

South and East Network of Social Sciences (SENSS) Doctoral Training Partnership

STUDENT-LED STUDENTSHIP COMPETITION: SUPERVISOR'S GUIDANCE NOTES

1. General information

This guidance is aimed at supervisors whose prospective students are entering the student-led studentship competition, which opens each October.

SENSS requires that all applicants discuss their application for a studentship with their proposed primary supervisor. In addition, the proposed primary supervisor is required to complete a supervisor's supporting statement as part of the application process. To support you in both advising applicants and drafting your statement, we would like to make you aware of the following points:

- a. SENSS offers studentships across [six Thematic Areas](#). The project should fall within at least one of the six Thematic Areas. Projects spanning more than one Theme are keenly encouraged but, for competition purposes, they will be considered by one Thematic Panel. In such cases, then, the supervisor should exercise their academic judgement to guide the applicant in selecting the one that seems most relevant for the project.
- b. Studentships must be offered as a **+3.5-year opportunity as a minimum**. This comprises the standard 3-year PhD, one additional term (+0.25) for a placement, and a further additional term (+0.25) which the ESRC funds to enable *all* students to undertake training relevant to their research project (including career progression).

Beyond this allocation for all students, there is also the provision for applicants to be funded for additional time in order to fill any gaps in the training necessary to pursue their research project. In the past, this was typically achieved by a 1+3 programme in which that training was provided by a one-year Masters degree. The ESRC has now moved to a more flexible model in which supervisors and DTPs assess the amount of preparatory training needed and the time required to achieve it. This may still be a Masters degree which would make for a **+4.5 award – the maximum length of a studentship**. But, in case that additional training is deemed to require less than a full Masters year, SENSS has provision for **+3.75, +4 and +4.25** studentships, reflecting the minimum allocation as above plus whatever time is deemed necessary for undertaking the required training.

- c. **All students are expected to undertake a placement for up to 3 months** during their funded award period. If, for good reason, they do not do so, their funded award period will be reduced by 3 months. Although applicants are **not required to have a placement agreed** by the time they submit their applications, some thought should be given to: a) who an appropriate placement provider might be, and b) when the placement should take place within the project timeline.
- d. Students **MUST submit their thesis by the end of their funded award period** as the ESRC no longer permits students to undertake an unpaid completion (write-up) year.
- e. **International students are eligible for this competition.** Like home students, they receive a full stipend and are not required to pay any tuition fees during their funded studentship. However, UKRI/ESRC rules stipulate that only 30% of the total number of studentships each DTP awards can be made to international students. For SENSS, this means awarding between 10 and 14 international studentships per year.

Important: applicants will not be considered for an award unless their proposed primary supervisors' supporting statement has been completed and submitted via SENSS' HEIapply on-line application platform by the deadline (12.00 GMT on Friday 9 February 2024).

2. Equality, diversity, and inclusivity approach to applications

SENSS universities are encouraged to put up to two additional applicants forward per UoA per Theme for consideration at the Thematic review phase if these **applicants meet certain [widening participation criteria](#)**. The first of these must be a home candidate who meets at least one of the agreed criteria, whilst the second must be both a home candidate and a BAME candidate. **We would strongly encourage you to support and encourage applicants meeting these criteria to apply to SENSS.**

3. Supervisor eligibility

To be eligible to supervise a SENSS-funded student, you must:

- Be a research-active member of staff. This is defined as someone:
 - Who was submitted by their HEI for REF 2021; and,
 - Whose HEI is subscribed to the relevant Thematic Area (i.e. whose HEI submitted at least one qualifying unit of assessment in the SENSS DTP application).
 - However, if you are an **early career researcher** who was not eligible for submission to REF 2021, you can still act as the primary supervisor where the second supervisor is someone who qualifies under the two points above and is an experienced supervisor ("experienced" is defined in the next two bullet points).
- Have supervised more than two students to completion OR work alongside either a second supervisor or an experienced mentor who meets that requirement; and,

- Have an excellent record of formal progress reporting in the previous 12 months for all doctoral researchers (or, if you are an early career researcher and have not supervised any/many doctoral researchers, the second supervisor must fulfil this criterion); and,
- Have attended supervisor training or supervisory best practice events in the past three years OR complete this training/attend an event within three months of their SENSS student starting their studies; and,
- Attend the mandatory SENSS supervisor training (which will take place over the summer of 2024) which focusses on issues specific to supervising a student holding ESRC funding.

4. The application process

- Applicants must first apply to your university for a place to study. **The deadline for doing so is determined by that university.**
- Next, your applicant must apply for a SENSS studentship. **The deadline for doing so is 12.00 GMT on Friday 9 February 2024.**
- Please note that there will be no separate interview process within SENSS; applicants will typically be interviewed by your HEI and this will serve also as part of the SENSS application process.

5. Summary of the supervisor's role in the application process

Please provide your applicant with the following advice/guidance:

- Outline guidance on drafting their research proposal;
- Whether their application qualifies for the six ring-fenced Data Skills or AQM studentships – view the Data Skills and AQM guidance [here](#);
- The appropriate structure/length of studentship for them (see section 1b, above) given their research methods training to date and, linked to this, whether the applicant has properly identified their training needs. If not, provide them with guidance on any additional training they might need to undertake;
- If the candidate has not yet identified a possible placement, provide them with some guidance about how to approach this issue, and when (within their research project timeline) that placement might best be undertaken;
- The ethical considerations their proposed research gives rise to; and,
- Whether their plan for overseas fieldwork, and/or language training, and/or any other research training is appropriate and properly costed.

In consultation with the applicant, identify who will act as **second supervisor** for this research project. The applicant will need to provide their details when completing their application form.

Finally, please provide a **supporting statement** for your applicant via SENSS's on-line application portal, HEIapply.

6. Using HEIapply

Once your applicant has drafted their application, you will receive an automated email from HEIapply, SENSS's online application platform, asking you to provide a supporting statement. If you can't find this email, please check your junk/spam box.

Please click on the link provided in the email and fill out the "Supervisor Statement" form. **THIS LINK CAN ONLY BE USED ONCE. PLEASE DRAFT YOUR SUPPORTING STATEMENT OFF-LINE AND CUT AND PASTE IT INTO HEIAPPLY ONCE YOU ARE CONTENT THAT IT IS COMPLETE.** Once you have submitted it, this statement cannot be amended again before the 9 February 2024 deadline.

7. Notes on completing your supervisor's statement

Tip: we suggest that you draft your answers using Word (or equivalent) which can count characters and then cut and paste it into the application form, to ensure you stick to the character limit. This limit includes spaces and other punctuation. To help guide you, generally speaking, the average number of letters in a word is 5 to 6.5.

7.1. Supervisory expertise

- All SENSS students must have two supervisors: a primary supervisor, based at the same institution as the applicant, and a second supervisor. The second supervisor can be based either at the same university, or at any of the other SENSS member institutions.
- You will be asked to confirm that the second supervisor has already been identified.
- You will also be asked which of you is considered 'experienced'. This sounds a subjective term but has a formal definition: 'experienced' means to have supervised more than two students to completion. Normally, either the primary or the second supervisor must fulfil this criterion. If the best supervisory team 'fit' consists of two inexperienced supervisors, however, they will be permitted to supervise if an experienced academic is appointed to mentor them. That mentor's name must be provided, along with an outline of how this mentoring arrangement will work.
- Please provide information about any supervisor training or best practice sessions you have attended in the past three years, as well as any attended by the second supervisor.
- You will be asked to comment, in a maximum of 1,000 characters, how the supervisory team will work together to support the applicant. Please address aspects such as:
 - Whether you have supervised students as a team before; and/or
 - Any other complementarities you consider as bringing particular strengths to the supervisory team.

7.2. Supporting statement

Before completing these three sections, please read the SENSS selection criteria on p. 5.

- (a) Please comment (in a maximum of 2,000 characters) on the quality and feasibility of your applicant’s research proposal. In doing so, please reflect on the following:
- The proposal’s broader significance in the Theme and discipline(s);
 - The positioning of the proposal in the relevant literature;
 - The research plan and timeline, including a placement; and,
 - The potential impact on professional practice.
 - SENSS ring-fences a certain number of studentships for projects using Advanced Quantitative Methods and/or Data Skills, so please indicate if your applicant’s research project falls into one of these categories as defined [here](#).
- (b) Please comment (in a maximum of 2,000 characters) on the applicant’s ability to conduct the proposed research. In doing so, please reflect on the applicant’s previous education, work, and life experience and the training they will need to complete this project. You will be asked within HEIApply to select the studentship structure (see section 1b, above) that you think most appropriate for this applicant. Use this section to explain your reasoning, noting any skills gaps, the training you recommend to fill these gaps, and the time required to do so.
- (c) Please comment (in a maximum of 3,000 characters) on the fit between this research proposal and your collective research agenda. In doing so, please refer to your recent publications or other intellectual contributions (within the latest REF cycle) that relate to this project, any work you have undertaken with external partners that has generated an impact on professional practice, and any existing or past supervision of other doctoral researchers in the same disciplinary area.

8. The SENSS studentship competition selection criteria

The following four criteria (weighted as indicated) will be used to assess applications across all Themes and degree formats.

Criterion	Definition
Quality and feasibility of proposal (40%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research question clearly outlined and answerable • Project located within existing literature and research • Research has potential to generate significant new knowledge • Research methods clearly described and appropriate for the task • Timetable plausible and project completable within the time available • Necessary evidence/data either available or collectible
Interdisciplinary and impact potential of proposal (10%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fit of project within relevant SENSS theme • Some attention given to the potential impact/use of the research beyond academia
Preparedness and potential of applicant (25%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to communicate purpose and method, including in personal statement • Basic grounding in substantively relevant discipline • Enthusiasm of supervisor’s supporting statement

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence of achievement, progression and/or potential in studies to date
Quality of local research environment, including supervisory expertise (25%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supervisory team offers expertise in both substance and methods of proposal Supervisory team offers combination of experience and training in supervision Researcher will be connected to wider peer network, within and/or beyond host department, school, and university

9. The studentship selection process

- The applications are reviewed internally by your university, which may nominate up to two applications per unit of assessment within each Theme it is involved in to the second round of the competition. In addition, **your university can nominate up to two additional applications per UoA within each Theme where the applicants are eligible under the SENSS widening participation criteria.**
 - If an applicant is unsuccessful at this first round, your university is responsible for informing both you and your candidate, and for providing feedback on the application.
- In the second round, applications are considered by the Thematic Groups, which nominate their best applicants to the SENSS Management Board for consideration.
 - If an applicant is unsuccessful in the second round of the competition, SENSS will let you and your applicant know and provide a short paragraph of feedback.
- The SENSS Management Board makes the final award decisions, and applicants will be told the outcome of their applications in mid-April.
 - If an applicant is unsuccessful in this final phase of the competition, SENSS will let you and the applicant know, and provide a short paragraph of feedback. If an applicant is unsuccessful, but is highly ranked, they will remain on the reserve list, in case any of the awardees turn down their offers.

10. Need more information?

For information about SENSS, please go to the [SENSS website](#).

If you have any further queries, please contact your university's [SENSS Operational Lead](#) in the first instance.