

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

## Supervisor-led Collaborative Studentship Competition Policy 2023

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## Introduction

SENSS has committed to **ring-fencing between six and eight of its studentships** for the supervisor-led collaborative studentship competition each year for the next five years.<sup>1</sup> These collaborative studentships are fully funded (where the applicants meet the studentship eligibility criteria) with one of the following structures awarded (noting that, where the student does not complete a placement, towards the end of the studentship the award would be reduced by 0.25):

- +3.5 - a standard +3.25 PhD and a one-term placement;
- +3.75 - a standard +3.25 PhD, one additional term to gain essential skills or undertake essential training in order to successfully deliver their PhD where they do not require a full Masters, and a one-term placement;
- +4.0 - a standard +3.25 PhD, two additional terms to gain essential skills or undertake essential training in order to successfully deliver their PhD where they do not require a full Masters, and a one-term placement;
- +4.25 - a standard +3.25 PhD, three additional terms to gain essential skills or undertake essential training in order to successfully deliver their PhD where they do not require a full Masters, and a one-term placement; or,
- +4.5 - a +4.25 award (either a 1+3.25 – a Masters followed by the now standard +3.25 year PhD, a 2+2.25 PhD, or a +4.25 PhD), and a one-term placement.

They are open to both home and international applicants and are required to be offered either as a full- or part-time opportunities unless the nature of the project is such that part-time study is not possible. The current competition is for collaborative studentships which will begin in the 2024/25 academic year (i.e., students will take up their awards in October 2024).

## What is a supervisor-led collaborative studentship project?

Supervisor-led collaborative studentship projects are those which involve a partnership with a non-academic partner, which can be a business, public, or third sector organization (termed a “collaborative partner”). Collaborative partners can be based in the UK, or overseas.

Collaborative partners must contribute something of value to the research project. There are a wide range of things such a partner can contribute, from a financial contribution to a contribution in-kind, or a combination of the two.

- A financial contribution could consist of paying up to 50% of the direct studentship costs (including fees and stipend, which is ~£14k p.a.), and/or travel costs for the student and supervisor to travel to meetings etc.
- An in-kind contribution could consist of one or more of the following: access to the collaborative partner’s data, use of their equipment, office space etc.

To participate in this competition, supervisors develop a research question and proposal in conjunction with a collaborative partner. The primary supervisor, who must be based at a SENSS HEI and who leads on the project, submits the research proposal application on behalf of their team to SENSS. If successful, the research project is awarded a studentship, which is then publicly advertised. If a suitable candidate is selected for that project, a collaborative studentship award will be offered to them to work with the supervisor and the collaborative partner on the research project.

All projects must be based primarily in one of the six SENSS interdisciplinary themes. If you wish to submit an application for a particular theme, you must first confirm that your home HEI is a member of that theme:

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<sup>1</sup> This is part of SENSS’s plan to meet the requirement that, over the lifetime of the DTP Grant, DTPs must ensure that at least 15% of their studentships must be collaborative in nature.

		City	Cranfield	Essex	Goldsmiths	Lincoln	Middlesex	Roehampton	UEA
1	Sustainability & Climate Emergency	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
2	Health, Well-Being & Social Care	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
3	Justice, Institutions & Social Change	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
4	Resolving Uncertainty & Addressing Crises	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
5	Digital Social Sciences	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
6	Advanced Methods for Social & Economic Research	X		X	X		X	X	X

Doctoral researchers (DRs) and supervisors involved with collaborative studentships must adhere to the requirements set down in the SENSS progress and training procedures, including attending SENSS training events, and participating in cohort building activities.

## A. CALL FOR SUPERVISOR-LED RESEARCH PROJECT PROPOSALS

### 1. Supervisor eligibility

All research proposals must name two supervisors: the primary supervisor (PS), who leads on the research project and who has overall responsibility for supervising the student attached to the project; and a second supervisor, who is not necessarily involved in the research project on a day-to-day basis, but who is familiar with it and brings their expertise to bear on the topic, as well as attending the supervisory progress meetings for the DR concerned. The supervisory team must also include co-supervisor from the collaborative partner.

The PS is responsible for submitting the research proposal on behalf of the proposed supervisory team. A PS may submit as many proposals as they like each year in which they are named as the PS.

To be eligible, the PS must:

- Be a research-active member of staff. This is defined as:
  - Someone who was successfully submitted by their HEI for REF 2021; and,
  - Whose research proposal comes under a SENSS interdisciplinary theme for which their HEI submitted a qualifying unit of assessment in the SENSS DTP bid.
  - If you are an **early career researcher** and were, therefore, not submitted for consideration in 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.
- Attend the compulsory supervisor training delivered by SENSS for successful supervisors in May/June;
- Either have undertaken approved professional development training in relation to your supervisory role within the last three years (this requirement must be satisfied by the time of

registration of the student concerned), or must undertake this training within three months of your doctoral researcher starting their studies); 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).

Responsibility for checking supervisor eligibility lies with the supervisor's HEI, which must confirm to SENSS that it has done so.

## **2. Submitting a proposal for a SENSS supervisor-led collaborative studentship award**

The PS is responsible for completing the application for a collaborative project and studentship. The *Guidance for Supervisors* document will steer the PS through this process.

To submit the proposal, the PS will need to create an account on SENSS's online application management platform, HEIapply. This can be done by going to the [SENSS website](#), and clicking on the "Apply" button at the top of the webpage. Separate guidance on how to use HEIapply is included in the *Guidance* document, which is also available on that webpage.

The PS will need to complete the four sections of the application form, as follows:

### **2.1. Supervisory team details**

This section of the application form requires information about the supervisory team.

### **2.2. Collaboration details, and a letter of support from the collaborative partner**

This section requires information about the collaborative partner, and the nature of the collaboration. It also requires that a letter of support from the collaborative partner must be obtained and uploaded as part of the application.

### **2.3. Proposal details**

This section requires information about the research project information about the type of studentships the PS considers appropriate for this project, and any factors the PS would like to be considered during the process to identify the best candidate to work on that particular research project.

### **2.4. Costing and funding**

This section requires a detailed explanation of all costs involved in the studentship.

Collaborative DRs will benefit from the same funding, training opportunities, and period of study, as any other SENSS DR. SENSS studentship awards will provide tuition fees and a stipend at the standard ESRC rate for between 3.5 and 4.5 years (which includes a three-month placement), as well as the opportunity to apply for additional funding, such as RTSG (Research and Training Support Grant) and funding for overseas fieldwork, during the life of their award.

Ideally, the collaborative partner will contribute financially to the cost of the studentship. However, this is not an absolute requirement.

- The SENSS partner HEI hosting the research project must commit to match-funding the full cost of the studentship, including the placement, at the agreed 25% unless the collaborative partner contributes financially to the studentship. Where this is the case, the SENSS partner HEI's contribution may be reduced.<sup>2</sup>
- Where the collaborative partner contributes financially to the studentship, this contribution may not exceed 50% of the studentship costs, as it is a UKRI requirement that 50% of the

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<sup>2</sup> For example, if the collaborative partner contributes 10% of the total studentship costs, the SENSS partner HEI will need to contribute the remaining 15% of the total costs.

studentship funding must come from the Research Council concerned (the ESRC). A studentship fully funded at 50% may mean that, where the contribution made by the collaborative partner is greater than the partner HEI's contribution would have been, the positive balance will be paid to SENSS.

### 3. Criteria for assessing supervisor-led collaborative project proposals

The criteria by which applications will be assessed is given in the table below. These criteria are subject to SENSS Strategy Board formal agreement, which meets 10 November 2023. If any changes made by the Strategy Board, the revised criteria will be circulated as soon as possible after that meeting, but it is not expected that there will be any major changes.

Collaborative (Supervisor phase)	Definition
Quality and feasibility of proposal (40%)	Purpose and question clearly outlined Project located within and advances on previous research and current state of the art Research has potential to generate significant new knowledge Research methods, potential risks, and timeline clearly described and appropriate for the task
Interdisciplinary and impact potential of the proposal (10%)	Fit of project within relevant SENSS theme Clear articulation of how the disciplinary perspective is enhanced by other disciplinary approaches Detailed attention given to the likely impact of the research within and beyond academia
Suitability and feasibility of wider project for a studentship (15%)	Clear outlining of role of researcher and project within collaboration Research question(s) discrete and answerable Project completable within the time available Necessary evidence/data either available or collectible
Quality of the collaboration and local research environment, including supervisory expertise (25%)	Strong links between applicant and partner organisation Evidence of past (or, in cases of new collaborations, potential) collaborative outputs and/or policy impact Opportunities for researcher to build network with practitioners, within and/or beyond collaborative partner
Quality and relevance of training and integrated placement (10%)	Collaboration enables Research in Practice training Placement makes clear contribution to specific or wider project Placement will enable the researcher to develop transferable skills

### 4. The sifting process

#### 4.1. Institutional review

Prior to submission to SENSS, proposals will be assessed by the PS's home HEI. There is no limit on the number of proposals each SENSS partner HEI may nominate for consideration; however, SENSS partner HEIs are asked to ensure that **only appropriate proposals of the highest quality are nominated to the next round of the competition.**

It is left to each SENSS partner HEI to determine how they will organise their sifting process after the deadline has passed for the submission of applications using HEIapply (**12.00pm GMT on 30 November 2023**), so long as institutionally nominated proposals are submitted to the SENSS core team, using HEIapply, by **12pm GMT on Friday 8 December 2023**, and the SENSS assessment criteria are used in reviewing these proposals.

Institutional selection panels are required to check that character counts have been adhered to and to confirm that their institution has checked supervisor eligibility and are content that the supervisors concerned are eligible. Any concerns should be noted (using the comments section of the review

form). Once a proposal has been nominated by a SENSS partner HEI, and has been submitted to the SENSS core team, there will be no further opportunities to improve it.

## 4.2. Further review process

### 4.2.1. Review by a specially convened selection panel, approved by the Management Board

A selection panel, which has been approved by the SENSS Management Board (MB), will be constituted to review, and rank the proposals put forward by each SENSS partner HEI. This ranking will initially be carried out on-line, using HEIapply, but the selection panel will meet virtually to confirm its final ranking of submissions. This selection panel will include:

- Chair: SENSS Director or Deputy Director;
- Two Thematic Group Chairs (this will be done on a rolling basis, e.g. Chairs of Themes 1 and 2 in year 1, Chairs of Themes 3 and 4 in year 2 etc);
- At least one SENSS non-HEI representative (from one of SENSS's partner non-HEIs which is not participating in the competition this year);
- At least one previous collaborative supervisor; and,
- A note-taker: the SENSS Co-ordinator, or, if unavailable, another member of the core team.

If a high number of applications are received, applications will be divided up evenly between the selection panel members, with each application being reviewed by at least three members.

### 4.2.2. Management Board review process

The final rankings will be circulated to the Academic Leads by email. The Academic Leads will be asked to approve the selection panel's recommendations for award.

### 4.2.3. Confirmation of award

Once these awards have been approved, the successful supervisors of the top-ranked proposals will be notified via email that they have been awarded a studentship and will be asked to confirm that they accept this award. Once they have accepted their awards, the supervisors will work with the SENSS core team to advertise these studentship opportunities in accordance with the set timetable (see section 4.3.).

All SENSS partner HEIs will be asked to advertise all awarded studentship opportunities internally, as appropriate.

**Should one or more of these studentships not be awarded, they will be returned to the studentship pool to be distributed through the student-led competition.**

## 4.3. Competition timetable

Activity	Date or timeframe
Soft launch of call for supervisor-led collaborative studentship research proposals issued	Monday 7 August 2023
Hard launch: webinar for supervisors considering applying for a studentship, led by the Deputy Director	12-2pm on Thursday 14 September 2023
HEIapply opens for applications to be submitted	By 3 November 2023
<b>Deadline for proposals to be submitted via HEIapply</b>	By 12.00pm (noon) GMT on Thursday 30 November 2023
<b>Institutional review phase</b>	
Institutional-level sifting and selection processes	Monday 30 November 2023 – Friday 8 December 2023
Deadline by which applications nominated by SENSS partner HEIs must reach the SENSS core team via HEIapply	By 12.00pm (noon) GMT on Friday 8 December 2023
<b>Note:</b>	

<i>Applicants should contact their Academic Lead for local level guidance on how the institutional stage of the competition will be managed at their home university. Home universities are responsible for conducting supervisor eligibility checks.</i>	
<b>Peer review phase</b>	
SENSS core team makes applications available to the MB sub-committee via HEIapply	Friday 8 December 2023
Selection panel members undertake their evaluations on HEIapply	Start: Friday 8 December 2023. Deadline for completion: 9.00am GMT on Friday 15 December 2023
SENSS core team compiles the evaluations, and circulates a document containing all evaluations to the selection panel	After 9.00am GMT on Friday 15 December 2023
Selection panel meets to agree the single ranked list of applications	Tuesday 19 December 2023
<b>Note:</b> <i>The applications will be assessed based on the selection criteria outlined in section A3.</i>	
<b>Management Board review and award phase</b>	
SENSS core team provides the single ranked list, including the final scores, and the meeting report to the Academic Leads via email	Tuesday 19 December 2023
Academic Leads confirm, via email, that they are content with the selection panel's recommendations for award	By 12.00pm (noon) GMT on Thursday 21 December 2023
Outcomes circulated	Thursday 21 December 2023
Successful applicants to provide wording for studentship adverts	No later than Thursday 4 January 2024
Advertisement of top-ranked research proposals, calling for candidates to apply for the attached collaborative studentships	No later than Tuesday 9 January 2024
Feedback provided to unsuccessful applicants	By Wednesday 17 January 2024

## B. STUDENTSHIP COMPETITION FOR SUPERVISOR-LED RESEARCH PROJECTS: PROCESS AND TIMELINE<sup>3</sup>

### 1. Application process

Applicants apply for a studentship connected to a particular project, using HEIapply, which will open for applications on Tuesday 9 January 2024, and close on Monday 11 March 2024.

### 2. Shortlisting process

- An **online shortlisting process** will be conducted to identify **three to four candidates** to be interviewed for each collaborative studentship. The shortlisting process will be conducted by the supervisory team - the primary and secondary academic supervisors, and the representative/supervisor from the collaborative partner. Grading forms must be completed on HEIapply for shortlisted candidates.
- Once the shortlisting process has been completed, **it is the supervisory team's responsibility to arrange the interviews**, which includes setting the date and times (in liaison with the SENSS core team to facilitate SENSS Director/Deputy Director availability), inviting the panel members

<sup>3</sup> Applicants may enter both the SENSS student-led studentship competition and the supervisor-led collaborative studentship competition. However, they may only be awarded one studentship if successful - either a collaborative OR a student-led award.

to attend and ensuring that they are properly briefed, and inviting the candidates to be interviewed.

- At a minimum, the interview panel must consist of the primary supervisor, the collaborative partner’s representative, and the SENSS Director or Deputy Director. Ideally, the second supervisor will also sit on this panel. The Operational Lead, or if they are unavailable, a member of the SENSS core team, should attend as note-taker. The partner HEI’s Academic Lead (or their representative) may also sit in on these interviews if they so wish.
- The interview should last approximately 30 minutes, and should cover appropriate topics, including whether the key criteria are met and how, as well as probing the candidate’s fit to the project.
- It is recognised that some research teams will already have identified a potential candidate for their studentship before the interviews take place. However, given the need to ensure fair and equal opportunities for all applicants, and to be able to assure all SENSS partner HEIs that these awards have been made in a transparent manner with the best candidate being appointed, there must be an interview process even where an ideal candidate has already been identified.
- After the interviews have been held, the panel must agree first and second places (the second ranked candidate will be the reserve candidate, provided they meet at least the minimum selection requirements; this is necessary in case the first ranked candidate declines). They must also note a few lines of feedback on each application which the supervisory team will be required to share with unsuccessful candidates.
- **Interview panels must not inform candidates they have been successful at this first stage:** they must let candidates know that there is a second and final stage to this competition – approval by the Academic Leads. However, they may informally advise the preferred and reserve candidate that they are progressing to the final stage of the competition.
- **By 12.00pm GMT on Monday 8 April 2024, the supervisory team must have nominated their preferred and reserve candidates for these awards via HEIapply;** and completed a brief form which sets out the reasons for making these nominations.
- These reports will be circulated to the Academic Leads to discuss and approve alongside student-led studentship candidates.
- Applicants must meet a certain standard to be appointable and, in cases where an appropriately qualified candidate is not identified, the funding for the studentship concerned will be redirected to the SENSS student-led competition.

### 3. Selection criteria for applications for the supervisor-led collaborative studentship competition

The criteria by which applications will be assessed is given in the table below. These criteria are subject to formal agreement by SENSS Strategy Board, which meets 10 November 2023. If any changes made by the Strategy Board, the revised criteria will be circulated as soon as possible after that meeting, but it is not expected that there will be any major changes.

Collaborative (Student phase)	Definition
Evidence of applicant’s suitability (“fit”) for this research project (40%)	Basic grounding in substantively relevant discipline Applicants’ interests and experiences linked to collaborative setting and/or wider goals of the project
Preparedness and potential of applicant, including in collaborative contexts (40%)	Evidence of achievement, progression and/or potential in studies to date Relevant experience (within- or extra-curricular) of and/or interest in research beyond academia
Evidence that applicant’s training needs, and placement have been properly identified and planned for (20%)	Collaborative partner has clear plan for supervising/ advising researcher Consideration given to methodological demands and hence training needs Role and scope of placement clearly outlined



### 3.1. Student shortlisting and selection timeline

The student shortlisting and selection process must take place between Monday 11 March 2024 and Monday 8 April 2024.

Activity	Date or timeframe
Supervisor-led collaborative studentships to be advertised	No later than Tuesday 9 January 2024
Deadline for applications to be received via HEIapply	12.00pm GMT on Monday 11 March 2024
<b>Institutional review phase</b>	
Institutional-level shortlisting and selection processes	After 12.00pm GMT Monday 11 March 2024 to 4.00pm GMT
Notification sent to shortlisted candidates (at least 1 week for interview date)	W/c 18 March 2024
Interviews of shortlisted candidates	W/c 25 March 2024 and W/c 1 April 2024
Date by which details of the two candidates nominated per research proposal must be submitted via HEIapply	12.00pm GMT on Monday 8 April 2024
<p><b>Note:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Partner HEIs are responsible for conducting supervisor eligibility checks, residential eligibility checks, and training compliance checks.</i></li> <li>• <i>The applications must be assessed solely based on the approved selection criteria.</i></li> </ul>	
<b>Management Board review phase</b>	
SENSS core team conducts due diligence checks on nominated candidates	By Wednesday 10 April 2024
SENSS core team provides the Management Board with a list of the candidates for the supervisor-led collaborative studentship competition (preferred candidate, plus reserve candidate, and the reasoning for this ranking)	Wednesday 10 April 2024
SENSS Management Board meets to confirm the studentship awards	To be confirmed, provisionally Wednesday 17 April 2024
Outcomes circulated	By Wednesday 24 April 2024

**Please note:** a supervisor-led collaborative studentship award is contingent on recruiting a suitable high-quality student. Confirmation of the final student selection is at the discretion of the SENSS Management Board.