

London Social Science (LSS) DTC

Guidance Notes for Applying for ESRC Postgraduate Research Funding (for 2012 entry)

Use the university web pages and those of the individual Schools and departments: there is plenty of general guidance about how to make an excellent application for postgraduate research programmes. Although some aspects are specific to their discipline and university, a particularly good set of web resources has been produced by Geography at Queen Mary (see Section 6 of this document for the webpage link).

The following sections of this document give most of the information. Some sections are particularly relevant for **applicants**, some parts below might be useful for their **referees**, and some are sections are intended for the selection panels in the **Departments/Schools** that will be receiving the applications.

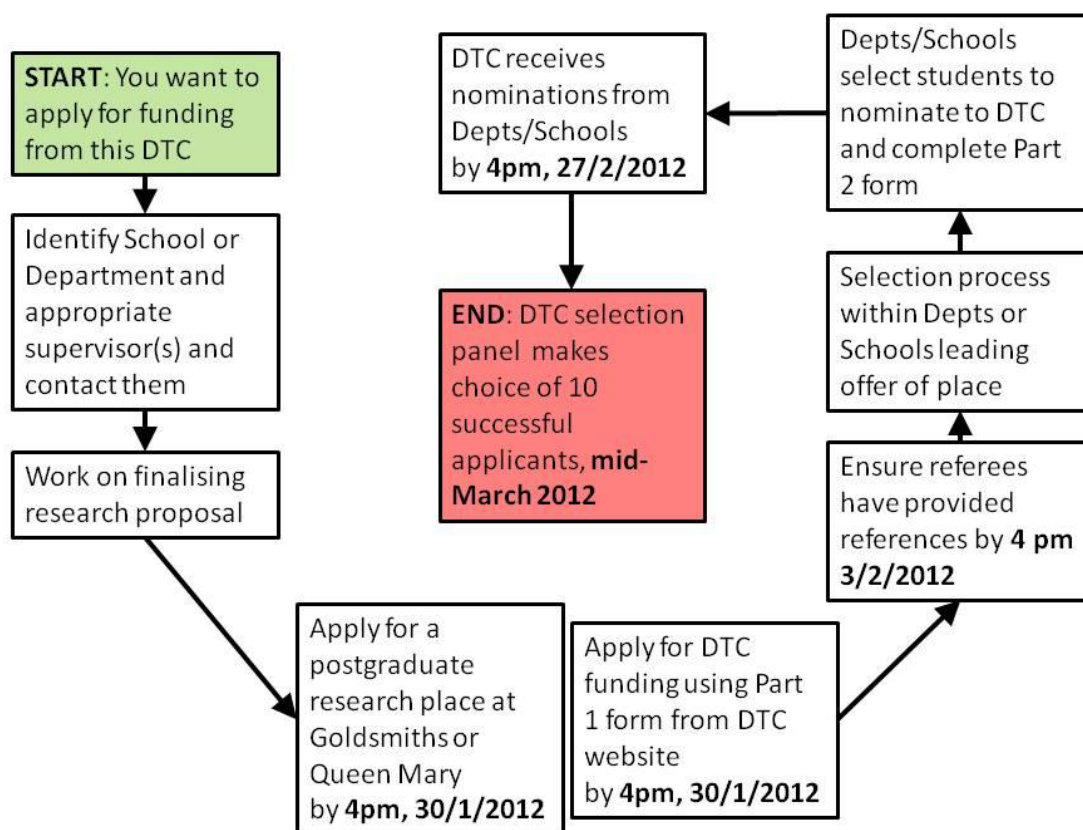
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1. Eligibility

- ESRC studentships are available from the Goldsmiths/Queen Mary Doctoral Training Centre for UK and EU students who meet the residence requirements set out by the ESRC. Check the [ESRC website](#) for guidance.
- Along with other Councils, the ESRC has relaxed the rules around international eligibility in strategic areas, allowing fees and stipends to be paid for students from outside the UK. Doctoral Training Centres will be able to recruit students for awards in Economics or Advanced Quantitative Methods without adhering to the current residential eligibility rules as laid out in the ESRC Postgraduate Funding Guide. The ESRC will pay the costs of the fees, for such students, to home/EU fee levels. The balance (international minus home/EU fee level) will be waived by the university to which you apply.
- In order to be eligible for the studentships, applicants must already hold a conditional or unconditional offer of a postgraduate research place in an appropriate school or department at either Queen Mary or Goldsmiths.

2. General process and deadlines

The diagram below illustrates the main steps:-



For any queries about the application process, please contact a member of the DTC staff team (see Section 6 for the weblink giving details).

3. How to write a research proposal

Applicants should write their research proposal in consultation with their prospective supervisor (see Section 4 below). The supervisor will have undertaken this exercise numerous times before and can be an invaluable resource. In the rest of this section, "you" refers to the applicant.

A good research proposal should explain what you plan to accomplish, why you want to do it, and how you are going to achieve the research goals. A PhD proposal should usually include a section on each of the following areas (a proposal for an MRes will necessarily be briefer and less fully developed):

- *Title* – this should be concise and descriptive.
- *Background and rationale* – this section sets up why this proposed research is needed. You can briefly summarise the key literature in this area, identifying the gaps in knowledge concerning your topic of interest. Most importantly, you must make a convincing case as to why your research would create valuable and useful knowledge.
- *Research questions* – you need to formulate your research questions clearly and concisely. You should have an answerable question that can be investigated thoroughly within the available timeframe. (You will need to judge whether these are most clearly expressed before or after the theoretical framework.)
- *Theoretical framework* – in this section you expand on the background by clarifying which theoretical approaches you will be drawing on and why. You can demonstrate your knowledge of

the research problem and your understanding of the theoretical context. Give consideration to broad issues within your chosen theoretical framework where appropriate, and note how they will affect the research process. Fully acknowledge those who have laid the groundwork for your research proposal.

- *Methods* – this section is very important and needs to contain sufficient detail concerning your plans for tackling your research problem. It should describe the practical steps necessary for the execution and completion of your project. If appropriate, you could demonstrate your knowledge of alternative methods, and make the case that your approach is the most appropriate and most valid way to address your research questions. Explain what data you will collect; how you will collect them, and what analyses you will perform on them. Explain what research skills you will need, and either show that you have them already or state how you will acquire them. Do not skimp on the methods and practical sections by writing too much on the background and theoretical context.
- *Practical Issues*—these must be considered in relation to your methods. If you are intending to undertake fieldwork, consider where this might best be undertaken and for how long? If your fieldwork involves external organisations, then can you demonstrate that they will give you access to all the resources you need. Will your proposed research require specialised training? If so, where can you obtain such training and what will it cost? Does your research involve significant running costs for materials, specialist equipment and consumables? If these items do not exist in your proposed department or school, and the costs are likely to exceed the funds available from an ESRC studentship, have you got other plans for securing the necessary funds?
- *Timescales* – it is important that you map out a reasonable schedule of your work so that you can monitor your own progress and manage your project effectively. Start with your intended finishing date and work backwards. Do not underestimate the amount of time that it takes to write a polished final thesis.
- *Dissemination* – your PhD should produce research of publishable quality. You might briefly note the type of publishable outputs you expect to generate and where you would like them to appear. This is especially important if you wish to pursue a career as an academic in a UK university.

Finally, where appropriate, it is very important that you note how your research proposal relates to the “disciplinary steers” given to the DTC by the ESRC and also the ESRC’s advice on collaborative research with external organisations (available on the DTC website, see Section 6 below).

4. Further information for Departments/Schools

a. Helping prospective applicants with completing their application

The Departments/Schools are strongly encouraged to work with prospective applicants on their applications. Before **deadline 1 (4pm, Monday 30.1.12)** someone from the department, probably the identified supervisor, should help the applicant with the drafting of the research proposal (Section 9 of the part 1 form). Naturally this proposal should NOT be written by the prospective supervisor but guidance and input are needed by even the best applicants. In particular, the prospective supervisor can help the applicant consider issues such as their need for advanced quantitative methods (AQM) training, negotiating an arrangement with an external collaborating organisation, and for emphasizing how their proposal links with the ESRC’s strategic research priorities. In the case where the identified primary supervisor is a junior member of staff, individual Departments and Schools might like to identify more senior colleagues who might be able to offer mentoring/guidance to the junior staff member concerned.

b. Selecting and nominating applicants for funding

Between **deadline 1** and **deadline 2 (4pm, Monday 27.2.2012)** departments/schools must determine whether they will offer the prospective applicant a place and, from those offered a place, determine whom they will nominate to the DTC selection panel for consideration for a funded studentship. Each approved disciplinary pathway can nominate up to 3 applicants, with the exception of psychology and politics (as there are pathways for these disciplines at both Queen Mary and Goldsmiths). These two pathways can nominate up to 2 applicants from each of the two institutions (i.e. a total of 4 nominations for psychology and 4 for politics).

c. Preparing a statement of support for nominated applicants

For those applicants, which a department/School wishes to nominate for funding, the department must complete part 2 of the application form. This makes a statement of support for the candidate, stressing their fit with the department/school's research priorities and strategy. This form and the nominations must be submitted to the DTC by **deadline 2**.

5. Assessment Process

Applications will first be assessed within the academic schools and departments at Goldsmiths and Queen Mary. Each department or school offering an accredited pathway will nominate their most highly-ranked candidates for consideration by a specially constituted "joint studentship awards (JSA) panel", acting for the DTC as a whole. The panel will have full details of the nominated applications, including all the paperwork submitted to the institutional admissions office for acceptance onto the programme. The JSA panel consists of academic staff from Goldsmiths and Queen Mary and an external advisor who is a specialist in the social sciences.

The departments and schools, and the JAS panel, will make academic judgements based on:

- a) Evidence of the applicant's research potential which may include previous academic achievements and degree results; the quality of their academic references and other professional qualifications; relevant experience and previous awards and prizes.
- b) The quality of the research proposal and preparedness for doctoral study.
- c) The potential of the project to contribute to the strategic priorities of the ESRC and the intellectual agendas of the respective departments or Schools represented within the DTC.

6. Useful Weblinks

The DTC website provides these guidance notes, forms, and other important information regarding how to apply for funding for your postgraduate research:-

<http://londonsocialscience.org.uk/studentship.html>

It also gives details where DTC staff can be contacted:-

<http://londonsocialscience.org.uk/staff.html>

The postgraduate research application pages at Goldsmiths and Queen Mary are given below:-

<http://www.gold.ac.uk/pg/apply/>

<http://www.qmul.ac.uk/postgraduate/applyresearchdegrees/index.html>

A particularly good departmental page (Geography, Queen Mary) gives lots of general advice that will be useful to an applicant from any discipline

<http://www.geog.qmul.ac.uk/admissions/phdadmissions/index.html>

Useful ESRC pages

<http://www.esrc.ac.uk/funding-and-guidance/guidance/postgraduates/>

<http://www.esrc.ac.uk/funding-and-guidance/funding-opportunities/looking-for-funding/studentship-stipends.aspx>