

# WRDTP Pathway, Advanced Quantitative Methods and Advanced Data Analytics Awards Guidance for Applicants

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## Who we are and who we're looking for

1. The ESRC-funded White Rose Doctoral Training Partnership (WRDTP) brings together the universities of Bradford, Hull, Leeds, Manchester Metropolitan, Sheffield, Sheffield Hallam, and York to provide a high-quality, supportive and inclusive environment for postgraduate research in the social sciences. We offer a welcoming and inclusive intellectual environment for all of our students, characterised by pluralist methodologies and theoretical approaches. We are also committed to working in collaboration with, and alongside, non-academic partners; to influencing public and social policy; and where appropriate, to involving affected communities and marginalised groups as partners in our research.
2. The WRDTP is organised around seven interdisciplinary [pathways](#), which bring together researchers from a range of disciplinary backgrounds who are working to address some of the world's most pressing social problems. Through our pathways, we strive to provide an intellectually stimulating, diverse community of researchers that transcends institutional, disciplinary and professional boundaries.
3. We are looking for motivated students with excellent ideas and a clear sense of how their proposed programme of social science research will make a difference, and shape how we understand our world and the problems that are faced. As a partnership we are committed to equality, diversity and inclusion; interdisciplinarity; academic rigour and excellence; and collaboration. Each year, we welcome students from a wide variety of academic backgrounds, and with a diverse range of lived experiences and perspectives, from countries worldwide.

## About our awards

4. We offer a number of fully-funded PhD studentships to equip the next generation of social science researchers with the skills and knowledge necessary to address the most pressing challenges facing the world today:

- Our **Pathway** awards offer applicants the opportunity to develop proposals for impactful social science research that engages with the key themes and challenges identified in our thematic interdisciplinary pathways.
- Our **Advanced Quantitative Methods (AQM)** awards are aimed at applicants who will use cutting edge quantitative research methods to facilitate impactful research that is aligned with our thematic interdisciplinary pathways. These projects will use either primary or secondary quantitative data to answer research questions about society.
- Similarly, our **Advanced Data Analytics (ADA)** awards are aimed at applicants who will use cutting edge data analysis techniques (which can be quantitative and/or qualitative), or will deploy large scale or 'big' data, to facilitate impactful research that is aligned with our thematic interdisciplinary pathways. These projects are likely to use forms of secondary data that are not commonly used in social science research, and that require particular techniques to understand and interpret those data.

5. Reflecting our commitment to addressing historic structural inequalities in education, we also offer two **Stuart Hall Foundation Awards for Black British students**. Applicants to this scheme will have research interests that align with Professor Stuart Hall's research legacy in the areas of securing wider access to education, race, ethnicity, cultural studies and structural inequalities. Further details can be found [here](#).

6. You can only be nominated by one WRDTP university for a WRDTP studentship. You can only submit one proposal. You may be nominated to more than one type of studentship by the university to which you are applying (e.g. you can be nominated for a Pathway Award and an Advanced Quantitative Methods award). If you would like to be nominated for more than one type of studentship, please indicate this in Section 1 of the application form.

7. All of our awards include a stipend (paid at the current UKRI rate) and full tuition fees, which will be paid for the duration of the funded period. Current rates can be found in the [call document](#).

8. The WRDTP is committed to preparing students for a wide range of careers, within and beyond academia. **From 2024/5, all of our awards include a 3-month 'Research in Practice' placement, which is compulsory for all students.** The WRDTP will work with students to identify a suitable placement, based on students' prior experience and future career aspirations. Our 'Research in Practice' placement can be taken on a full-time or part-time basis. **You do not need to have identified a placement to be able to apply for one of our studentships.** Please see [FAQs](#) for more information.

9. All of our awards are offered on a full-time or part-time basis. All of our awards are open to home and international applicants. Please see [FAQs](#) for more information.

## Selecting the most appropriate programme based on your prior experience

10. The ESRC expects that all funded students acquire a range of core research skills during their studies. To ensure that all students acquire these skills, the structure and duration of the WRDTP's awards depend on the applicant's previous academic experience, in particular any social science research training already undertaken.

11. Applicants should choose a programme based on their prior academic experience, and in consultation with their proposed supervisor. As part of the nomination process, the supervisor will conduct a 'Development Needs Analysis', which is intended to ensure that applicants receive research training that is most suited to their experience and development needs. Depending on their prior academic experience, applicants will normally select a programme as follows:

- Applicants without a social science masters degree will normally be funded for 4.5 years, undertaking a 1 year MA Social Research followed by 3.5 year PhD.
- Applicants who already have a social science masters degree, but have fewer than 60 credits of M-level social science research training will normally be funded for 3.75 years to undertake an integrated PGCert/PhD.
- Applicants with a social science masters degree and with 60 or more credits of M-level social science research training will normally be funded for 3.5 years to undertake a PhD.

12. Your supervisor or university will be able to advise you about the most appropriate route for you, based on your prior experience. The WRDTP regards any degree where at least 50% of the taught modules [fall within an ESRC area](#) as being a 'social science' degree.

13. All students will also have many opportunities to deepen and expand their research expertise through a flexible programme of training that is delivered by the WRDTP, our pathways and by individual universities. Students will work with supervisors to identify their specific research training and development needs at regular intervals by undertaking a Development Needs Analysis, so that training can be undertaken at the appropriate point in a student's studies. The Development Needs Analysis process ensures that all students receive training that is aligned to their own research and development needs.

## Entry requirements and how to apply

14. We welcome applicants from eligible social science schools and departments in our seven partner universities (i.e. Bradford, Hull, Leeds, Manchester Metropolitan, Sheffield, Sheffield Hallam, and York). A full list of eligible schools and departments can be found [here](#). **To be eligible for a WRDTP award, applicants must hold an offer for a PhD place in an eligible school or department, and must be intending to undertake a social sciences research project that is within the ESRC's remit.**

15. Applicants do not apply directly to the WRDTP for an award, but are instead nominated by their university. You should therefore allow sufficient time to liaise with potential supervisors. You should also ensure that you observe any processes or deadlines that the individual department, school or university has in place for assessing applications. All

universities are required to have fair and equitable processes for determining which applicants should be nominated to the WRDTP for consideration.

16. As part of the nomination process, you will be required to complete a WRDTP Studentship Application Form. Please note that this is a separate process, and is in addition to any form that you may have completed when applying for a place to study a PhD at your chosen university.

17. Applicants must meet the entry requirements of their nominating school or department. The ESRC also stipulates that: 'for all studentships, students must have qualifications of the standard of a good honours degree at first- or upper second-class level, from a UK academic higher education institution, or, through a combination of qualifications and/or experience, be able to demonstrate equivalence. In the majority of cases, students will have undertaken an undergraduate course at a recognised UK higher education institution or equivalent international qualification. Prior qualifications may be enhanced to meet these requirements by the acquisition of at least one satisfactorily completed academic year of full-time study or its part-time equivalent (i.e., two years) towards a UK higher degree, if applying for an award without an undergraduate degree'. **Please note that applicants must satisfy their university's entry requirements AND the ESRC's minimum threshold.**

18. The ESRC limits the proportion of awards available to international applicants to 30%, which means that the WRDTP cannot offer any more than 30% of its awards to international candidates each year. To manage this, each of our universities has a limit on the number of international applications that it puts forward to the WRDTP. If you are an international candidate, you should speak to your school or department to find out about the selection processes that may be in place.

### **How to complete the WRDTP application form**

19. All applicants are required to complete the same application form. This form must be completed by you as the applicant. However, we do encourage you to discuss your application with your supervisor, and to allow enough time to develop a high quality research project. We also recommend that you familiarise yourself with the WRDTP's Studentship Assessment Criteria, which can be found [here](#). Only the information provided by you as the applicant in the application form attracts marks.

20. You should complete all fields in the application form. **Please ensure that you observe the word limits for each field, as the WRDTP reserves the right to reject over-length applications outright.**

21. In **Section 1 ('Your details')**, you should select the correct programme of study, based on your previous academic experience. Your supervisor can help you identify the right programme. You should also select the relevant studentship/s. Whilst you are only allowed to submit one application form to the WRDTP, you may apply for more than one award scheme, using the same application form. For example, your proposed research may fit with both our Pathway and Advanced Quantitative Method award schemes. If you apply for more than one award, your application will be assessed by each scheme's assessment panel.

22. In **Section 2 ('About your project')**, you have the opportunity to provide detailed information about your proposed research. **This is the most important part of the application, and is double-weighted.** We are interested in your research ideas and your ability to identify the contribution of your proposed research to academic and empirical knowledge; your understanding of what constitutes an effective research design; and your ability to think through the ethical dimensions and practical challenges that your research may face. This section is broken down into a series of short fields to help you address all of these points. **When thinking through your research ideas, it is important that you are realistic about the scope and scale of your project to ensure that your research can be completed (i.e. your thesis submitted) within the funding period.** We want to ensure that our students undertake high-quality, yet manageable, research projects so that they are not overburdened.

23. Section 2 also includes additional fields that should be completed by anyone who is applying for an **Advanced Quantitative Methods (AQM) award and/or an Advanced Data Analytics (ADA) award.** You should use this section to explain the methodological challenges that your project highlights and the methods that you intend to use to overcome those challenges. Both AQM and ADA studentships are social science awards. This means that all research projects should aim to answer a social science research question, and ensure that the project is clearly located within relevant literature and debates in a given social science discipline(s), as with any other WRDTP studentship:

- **Advanced Quantitative Methods:** These projects will use either primary or secondary quantitative data to answer research questions about society. Usually the methods used will go beyond the basic quantitative methods that are often learned in "Introductory Quantitative Methods" modules in social science bachelors and masters programmes for the disciplines they are embedded in. So projects will usually do something more than bivariate analysis/regression, depending on the research question and data being used. For instance, the methods used might deal with complex data structures, consider how to identify causal effects (as opposed to associations), or consider spatial or temporal variability.
- **Advanced Data Analytics:** These projects are likely to use forms of secondary data that are not commonly used in social science research, and that require particular techniques to understand and interpret those data. These datasets may include administrative data, unstructured commercial data (such as loyalty card databases), data created through digital interactions between people and/or organisations (e.g. social media data), and interactions with urban environments (such as transport footfall data or phone tracking data). These data are often underutilised in the social sciences, whilst being information rich. They are often large (often described as "Big Data") and sometimes are not representative of broader populations. This means that they are often suitable for answering different research questions, and require different techniques from more traditional datasets that are used more regularly in the social sciences (such as representative surveys).

24. In **Section 3 ('Your project's fit with WRDTP core priorities')**, you are asked to explain how your research aligns with at least one of our thematic interdisciplinary pathways. As explained above, our pathways focus on pressing challenges facing the world today, and bring together researchers from a range of disciplinary backgrounds who are working on

issues of shared concern. It is common for a research project to relate to more than one pathway. If this is the case, you should use this section to explain how your proposed research is relevant to more than one pathway.

25. Section 3 also asks you to explain how your research has the potential to benefit society and economy, and the steps that you will take to realise these benefits. In this section, we are interested in your understanding of what constitutes beneficial research, and your ideas about how to engage non-academic audiences. If you would like to know more about how your research can make a difference to society and the economy, there are useful resources such as [UKRI's guide to 'impact'](#), and [Find A PhD's top tips for students](#). If you have links with non-academic partners (e.g. through professional, work or volunteer experience) that you wish to draw upon, you are welcome to discuss these. However, there is no expectation that applicants will have existing relationships, and the core purpose of this section is for you to demonstrate your understanding of the research's potential benefits and your ideas for realising them.

26. In **Section 4 ('Your motivation and potential')**, you should explain what motivates you to undertake the research project outlined in your application. In this section, you should focus on your research and be as specific as possible about why you are motivated to undertake this research, rather than providing broad statements about your general motivations or aspirations. You are welcome to highlight a variety of factors that motivate you, e.g. intellectual, personal, professional.

27. Section 4 also provides you with the opportunity to draw on evidence that demonstrates your potential to undertake doctoral-level research. The WRDTP recognises that applicants have a diverse range of experiences and skills, and that evidence of potential can take many forms. Such evidence may include academic achievements, but can also include a much wider range of professional, voluntary or personal achievements. The WRDTP also recognises the vital importance of transferable skills, such as resilience, adaptability, project management and the ability to deliver to deadlines. Think about the skills that you have, and how these would help you as a doctoral student. When completing this section, be as specific as possible, and make sure that you provide evidence of the skills or experience you want to demonstrate.

28. **Section 5 (Stuart Hall Foundation Award statement)** is an optional field for applicants who wish to apply for one of our two Stuart Hall Foundation Awards. These awards are open to those who self-identify as Black British applicants. When completing this section, think in particular about how your proposed research fits with the SHF mission and values, and its potential wider benefits to society. The assessment criteria for Stuart Hall Foundation Awards is [here](#). **Please note that this part of the application form is considered by a separate sub-panel comprising the WRDTP Director and 4-5 members of the WRDTP Academic Quality Committee. For the purposes of assessment, your statement will not be shared beyond this sub-panel. If the WRDTP recommends that you are awarded one of these awards, your full application form (and the nomination form completed by your university) will also be shared with the Stuart Hall Foundation for final approval.**

### **How your application will be assessed:**

29. As detailed above, applicants are nominated to the WRDTP by their university. You do not apply directly. Again, please ensure that you observe any processes or deadlines that the individual department, school or university has in place for assessing applications.

30. Further information about the WRDTP's own processes and deadlines can be found in the [call document](#). Please be aware that all deadlines are fixed, and that extensions will not be granted. **Late nominations will not be accepted.**

31. All applications are assessed against the WRDTP's Studentship Assessment Criteria, which can be found [here](#). We strongly recommend that you familiarise yourself with the assessment criteria. Only the information provided by you as the applicant in the application form attracts marks.

32. All applications are scored by two independent assessors drawn from our seven WRDTP universities. To avoid conflicts of interest, your application will not be assessed by someone from the university that has nominated you for consideration.

33. All assessors are academics with expertise in the social sciences. You should ensure that your proposed project can be understood by someone who is not familiar with your specific area of interest.

34. Award decisions will be communicated to the nominating university, which is then responsible for sharing decisions with applicants, in accordance with the timescale set out in the call documents. Owing to the volume of nominations received, the WRDTP is unable to offer feedback on individual applications.

**WRDTP  
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