

## SeNSS: ADVICE REGARDING THE CHOICE OF STUDENTSHIP ROUTE

### This advice is for students, supervisors, and Pathway selection panels

The ESRC argues that students should have completed almost all their core methods and research design training, and some generic training, before they embark on their final 3 years of studying for their PhD. As a result, SeNSS is required to ensure that all the Masters, 2+2, and +4 PhDs it offers includes this training.

As noted, SeNSS offers various routes to a PhD over 3 to 4 years. The most common are the +3 PhD only route, and the 1+3 Masters plus PhD route, but 2+2 and +4 awards are also available on some Pathways.

An applicant without any postgraduate core research methods and research design training will need to apply for a 4-year route, most often a 1+3. If the 1+3 route is chosen, the applicant must take an approved Masters at a SeNSS institution. The list of approved Masters is available [here](#). There are some approved 4-year (either 2+2 or +4) PhD programmes which may be an alternative for these applicants. The key training is delivered in year 1 of such PhDs and is equivalent to the training in an approved Masters. This route does not lead to a Masters award, and does not require the student to submit a Masters dissertation. The list of approved 4-year PhDs at SeNSS is available [here](#).

In other cases, the applicant will have completed (or still be studying) a Masters when they apply for a SeNSS studentship. If the applicant studied at a SeNSS institution, they should consult [the list of SeNSS approved courses](#) to see if their Masters is on this list. If it is, the applicant is eligible for a +3 PhD. If not, their Masters will need to be assessed to see if it is compliant. If it is, the applicant can take a +3 PhD. If not, the gaps in the applicant's past training will need to be identified, and a decision taken as to whether they should be offered an extra 3 or 6 months' funding to fill those gaps.

Difficult cases can also arise when the applicant has done (or is doing) a Masters at a university outside SeNSS, including overseas.

In the first instance, those applying for SeNSS studentships are encouraged to use the research methods training compliance calculator that SeNSS has created, which is available [here](#). This calculator aims to guide applicants and their supervisors in identifying – **before they start their SeNSS application** – which studentship structure they should be applying for. Completing the form will result in applicants being advised immediately which structure is recommended for them. Applicants are advised to download a copy of the form and the results, and to share this with their supervisor as soon as possible. This is to ensure that the applicant has completed the form correctly, but also that the supervisor is aware of the advice the applicant has been given. **Please note that the calculator is for guidance only.** The final decision will still lie with SeNSS, and applicants and their supervisors are encouraged to raise questions or concerns directly with SeNSS ([manager@senss-dtp.ac.uk](mailto:manager@senss-dtp.ac.uk)), which will guide applicants on the studentship structure they should apply for.

In their SeNSS application, the applicant is asked to indicate what route they are applying for. This choice (on the form) is simply indicative, as we find that many applicants do not make the right selection. It is hoped that the research methods compliance calculator will improve this selection, but applicants and their supervisors should not get too concerned about which route has been indicated on the form, as this might not be the award that is eventually received.

Where the applicant's Masters or professional experience are judged to partially satisfy the ESRC training requirements, it is not necessary to require them to take a whole Masters (the 1+3 year route). **SeNSS has the option to award +3.5 or +3.25 awards, in which the extra 6 or 3 months of funding is designed to allow the student to take modules that bring their training up to the level and spread required by the ESRC.**

If it is felt that the applicant should apply for a +3.25 or a +3.5 award, they should note on their application form that they are applying for a +3. They should briefly state in their research proposal what their training gaps are, and how they propose to fill these. In their supporting statements, supervisors will be asked to confirm these gaps and how they will be filled, as well as the length of award they view as appropriate (+3.25, or +3.5, if the +3 or 4-year award is not appropriate on the basis of the past research methods training).

If an applicant has already started their PhD and is applying for two years' funding, they must tick "+3" as the structure of their studentship. If they have training gaps, they will also be eligible for additional funding (either +2.25 or +2.5 year awards). They will also be required to identify their training gaps and how these will be filled. This will need to be confirmed by their supervisor in their supporting statement.

Please note that those applicants who have already started their 2+2 or +4 PhDs are **not eligible** for SeNSS studentships unless those PhDs are on the SeNSS [compliant PhD list](#) (and they have at least 50% of their formal studies remaining to be done).

Applicants will be asked in their SeNSS application to provide information about their Masters and/or their professional training (where this has provided them with research methods training or experience).

However, it is not sufficient to tell us that it includes a module on qualitative or quantitative methods, for example, as many modules with these titles do not meet ESRC requirements. What we need is a summary of all of the Masters modules that have any significant research training element within them. This summary may be provided via a weblink to the module description / outline, or a PDF of the module description / outline, and should contain details of all sessions and topics and their assessment. This is necessary whenever the student has done (or is doing) a Masters that is not on the SeNSS approved list. Where an applicant argues that their professional experience or training has provided the requisite skills, they will be asked to set out what skills they have, and how they obtained these.

All awards made will be compliance-checked by SeNSS, which will identify any supplementary training modules required. These modules will be included in the students' award letter and, ordinarily, the student will be required to take and pass the module assessments.

Notwithstanding this advice, if applicants, their supervisors, or home institutions remain unsure of whether the applicant has sufficient research methods training to satisfy the ESRC's requirements, they should **contact the SeNSS core team as early as possible** to confirm whether they require additional training and, if so to identify how it will be delivered. Please email the SeNSS Manager ([manager@senss-dtp.ac.uk](mailto:manager@senss-dtp.ac.uk)) in the first instance.