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## THE MARKING SCHEME AND ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

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Cross-institutional Subject Area Review Panels are kindly asked to grade and comment on three aspects of the application:

- Research Proposal (32);
- Supervision (12);
- Training and Development and Research Environment (12);

Giving an aggregate score out of 56.

Applications that score below 50% of the mark in any area will automatically be considered ineligible for funding.

Assessment of Collaborative Doctoral Award applications should also consider the following criteria:

- The contribution the project will make to the operations of the partner organisation.
- The fit of the supervisors from the partner organisation.
- The account of the quality of skills development opportunities offered by the partner organisation, and how they will meet any potential specific training and development needs of the student recruited to the project.
- The quality of the research environment, in terms of research priorities, facilities and resources at the partner organisation.

## Research Proposal

In assessing the quality of the research proposal, assessors should consider the following:

- **Research question:** Are the research question(s) or problem(s) clearly defined? How important is it that these questions should be addressed? How timely are they?
- **Research context:** What other research is being, or has been, conducted in this area? What particular contribution will this project make to the advancement of knowledge and understanding in the field? Has the applicant placed their proposal in an appropriate context, giving due consideration to other work in the field?
- **Research methods:** How, during the PhD, will the applicant seek to answer the questions or address the problems? Is there an adequate rationale for their chosen research methods? Do the research methods provide an appropriate means by which to answer the research question(s)? Is the research likely to raise ethical or safety issues and, if so, are these addressed in the proposal?
- **Practical viability:** Does the applicant provide evidence that the project can be feasibly completed within up to three and a half years of full-time funded study or up to seven years of part-time funded study? Have the costs and resource implications of undertaking the fundamental research been adequately considered?

Grade	Descriptor
29-32	<p>An <i>outstanding</i> research proposal: Research questions or problems are clear and cogent, and the proposal demonstrates a comprehensive awareness of the research context and of the contribution that the research will make to the field. The applicant has made a compelling case both for the intellectual and social importance of this research and for the choice of research methods or approach. The research is demonstrably feasible within the period of supervised study. Any ethical or safety issues have been identified and appropriately addressed. To be funded as a matter of the highest priority.</p>
25-28	<p>An <i>excellent</i> research proposal: Research questions or problems are clear and cogent, and the proposal demonstrates a sound awareness of the research context and of the contribution that the research will make to the field. The applicant carefully addresses the intellectual and social importance of the research and research methods or approach are well justified. The research is feasible within the period of supervised study, and any ethical or safety issues have been identified and appropriately addressed. To be funded as a matter of priority, though does not merit the highest priority rating.</p>
21-24	<p>A <i>very strong</i> research proposal: Research questions are clear and cogent, and the proposal demonstrates a sound awareness of the research context and of the contribution that the research will make to the field. The methodology or approach is appropriate, and the research is likely to be feasible within the period of supervised study. Any ethical or safety issues have been identified and appropriately addressed. Worthy of consideration for funding.</p>

17-20	<p>A <i>strong</i> research proposal:  Research questions are clear, and the applicant demonstrates awareness of the research context and the contribution that the proposed research will make. Methods or approach seem appropriate and the research is probably feasible within the period of supervised study. Any ethical or safety issues have been identified and appropriately addressed. Fundable, but not as a matter of priority.</p>
13-16	<p>A <i>good</i> research proposal:  Research questions are identified, and the proposal demonstrates some awareness of both the research context and the contribution the research will make. There is some awareness of its intellectual importance and methodological requirements. The research may be feasible within the period of supervised study and ethical or safety issues have been identified. In the competitive context of the NBCDTP competition, the proposal is not recommended for funding.</p>
9-12	<p>A research proposal with some strong aspects, but with weaknesses in one of the following areas: research questions/ problems, awareness of research context, contribution to the discipline, intellectual significance, methodology, feasibility, or ethical or safety considerations. Not fundable.</p>
5-8	<p>A research proposal with some strong aspects, but with weaknesses in more than one of more of the following areas: research questions/ problems, awareness of research context, contribution to the discipline, intellectual significance, methodology, feasibility, or ethical or safety considerations. Not fundable.</p>
1-4	<p>A research proposal with serious shortcomings in one or more areas. Not fundable.</p>

## Supervision

This section of the Application Form should comment on the suitability of the supervisory team, noting the supervisors' previous track record of successful supervision and any involvement in postgraduate training. Research expertise and publications that are relevant to the project can be included, however it is not advisable to concentrate on the supervisors' research excellence to the detriment of demonstrating the excellence of the fit between supervisor and research project. When considering the supervisory team, and training and development requirements, schools/departments may look beyond their own institution in order to identify possibilities for cross-consortium supervision. There is no requirement to do so, however, and applicants will not be penalised either way.

A strong application will be one in which the supervisors have expertise in an area closely related to the proposal and where, in the case of Collaborative Doctoral Awards, there is clear evidence that the student will be strongly supported by the partner organisation. A strong application will also have considered the opportunities available across the NBCDTP, and built these into the application where they add value. In a weak application, the supervisor will not be expert in the area.

Wherever possible, Subject Area Review Panels are asked to take into consideration that the NBCDTP seeks to support research at *all* partner institutions. As part of that aim, it actively values the distinct research environments of each partner institution and, moreover, seeks to support the building of capacity across the partner institutions, including supporting the development of early career supervisors and others who have not had the opportunity to supervise large numbers of PhD students.

*The Descriptors below also include criteria pertinent to Collaborative Doctoral Awards (in italics).*

Grade	Descriptor
11-12	<i>An outstandingly close fit between supervisory expertise and the proposed project, and an excellent track record commensurate with the supervisors' career stage and institutional context. To be funded as a matter of the highest priority. Expertise of the Partner organisation supervisor(s) is outstanding, and very closely aligned with the needs of the project.</i>
9-10	<i>An excellent fit between supervisory expertise and the proposed project and a strong track record commensurate with the supervisors' career stage and institutional context. To be funded as a priority, though does not merit the highest priority rating. Expertise of the Partner organisation supervisor(s) is fully appropriate and closely aligned with the needs of the project.</i>
7-8	<i>A strong supervisory fit. Worthy of consideration for funding. Expertise of the Partner organisation supervisor(s) is appropriate and reasonably well aligned with the needs of the project.</i>
5-6	<i>A good supervisory fit, but may lack a track record of supervision commensurate with career stage. In the competitive context of the NBCDTP competition, not possible to be considered for funding. Expertise of the Partner organisation supervisor(s) is acceptable, but may not be aligned with the needs of the project.</i>

3-4	Supervisory arrangements that have some strengths, but with weaknesses in fit between the project and expertise of the supervisory team and a lack of track record commensurate with career stage. Not appropriate for funding. <i>Expertise of the Partner organisation supervisor(s) is neither relevant/appropriate nor aligned with the needs of the project.</i>
1-2	Significant shortcomings in one or more areas; not suitable for funding.

## Training and Research Environment

The application should address the ways in which the research strengths of the school/department, as well as any interdisciplinary research groups, clusters, centres, and institutes, specialised facilities/resources, and external partnerships are relevant to the research project. It should also specify how the student will be integrated into this environment. This section of the Application Form should also identify any potential skills training and professional development needed for the successful completion of the research project. **Please do not include general statements about the generic skills training available within the NBCDTP.** When considering potential training and development requirements, schools/departments are advised to look beyond their own institution in order to identify possibilities for research group participation and training opportunities, including those provided by external organisations.

A strong application will be where: the student will be well integrated into the school/department and/or appropriate interdisciplinary structures, and, in the case of collaborative doctoral awards, into the research culture of the partner organisation; facilities or resources are available to support the student's research; and any potential training needs have been fully considered, along with a clear sense of how these will be met. A strong application will also have considered the opportunities available across the NBCDTP and built these into the application where appropriate. In a weak application, the school/department or partner organisation will not be a suitable host for the proposed research and/or there will be no interdisciplinary structures to provide a supportive research environment. A weaker application may be characterised by limited consideration of the potential training needs of the student, which may constrain their ability to conduct the research. A weaker application may also lack awareness of the relevant research environment, resources, and training opportunities elsewhere in the NBCDTP.

Once again, Subject Area Review Panels are asked to take into consideration that the NBCDTP seeks to support research at all partner institutions. As part of that aim, it actively values the distinct research environments of each partner institution. Research environments vary for many reasons (including their capacity to attract self-funded PhD students). We ask reviewers to recognise that size alone is not necessarily a good indicator of quality. A relatively small department with a cluster of researchers highly appropriate to the project may be a better environment than a much larger department that lacks a close connection to the applicant's work.

*The Descriptors below also includes criteria pertinent to Collaborative Doctoral Awards in italics:*

Grade	Descriptor
11-12	<p><i>Outstanding</i> research environment: Clear and compelling evidence that the student will be extremely well integrated into appropriate research groups/clusters/centres/institutes, and that any potential training and development needs have been fully considered. To be funded as a matter of the highest priority.</p> <p><i>Compelling evidence that the student will be extremely well integrated into the research environment of the Partner organisation. There is a clear and compelling sense that the development opportunities offered by the Partner organisation are outstandingly appropriate.</i></p>

9-10	<p><i>Excellent</i> research environment: Evidence that the student will be very well integrated into appropriate research groups/clusters/centres/institutes. The majority of any potential training and development needs have been carefully considered. To be funded as a priority, though does not merit the highest priority rating. <i>Evidence that the student will be very well integrated into the research environment of the Partner organisation. The development opportunities offered by the Partner organisation are excellent.</i></p>
7-8	<p><i>A strong</i> research environment: A strong sense that the student will be well integrated into appropriate research groups/clusters/centres/institutes. Some potential training and development needs have been considered. Worthy of consideration for funding. <i>A strong sense that the student will be well integrated into the research environment of the Partner organisation. The Partner organisation offers appropriate development opportunities.</i></p>
5-6	<p><i>A good</i> research environment: Evidence that there are research groups/clusters/centres/institutes into which the student could be integrated. Potential training needs have been addressed, but cursorily. In the competitive context of the NBCDTP competition, not possible to be considered for funding. <i>Evidence that there is a research environment at the Partner organisation into which the student may be integrated. The development opportunities offered by the Partner organisation are limited.</i></p>
3-4	<p>A research environment that has some strengths, but with weaknesses in respect of school or departmental research strengths or interdisciplinary infrastructure. Insufficient attention given to potential research training needs. Not appropriate for funding. <i>Involvement of the Partner organisation in terms of research environment and development opportunities is not relevant/inadequate.</i></p>
1-2	<p>Significant shortcomings in one or more areas; not suitable for funding.</p>