

Studentship Competition Guidance Notes for Staff and Applicants

This Guidance applies to: Standard PhD, Creative Practice, Interdisciplinary and Collaborative Doctoral Awards (Student-led) Studentships.

Please read the information provided below in its entirety. Failure to follow the advice provided, particularly when completing the Studentship Nomination Form, may seriously disadvantage an applicant's chances of success.

NORTHERN BRIDGE
CONSORTIUM DOCTORAL
TRAINING
PARTNERSHIP



Arts & Humanities
Research Council

Introduction

This document is intended to provide guidance to **members of staff** at Northern Bridge Consortium Doctoral Training Partnership (NBCDTP) partner institutions and to **applicants** on the selection process and administrative arrangements for the NBCDTP Studentship Competition.

The NBCDTP runs an annual studentship competition to recruit and select postgraduate doctoral students of the very highest calibre to study at Durham University, Newcastle University, Northumbria University, Queen's University Belfast, University of Sunderland, Teesside University and Ulster University. The competition is open to all applicants who meet the AHRC's eligibility criteria.

Two nomination routes are offered:

- Standard PhD (including Creative Practice and Interdisciplinary proposals)
- Collaborative Doctoral Award (Student-led) (which can also include Creative Practice and Interdisciplinary proposals)

The Studentship Competition is designed to be open and transparent, with academic and professional services support staff actively engaged in and supporting the application process. All assessment decisions are based on clear and agreed assessment criteria detailed in [Annex 3](#).

NBCDTP is an inclusive community, where everybody – staff and students – are treated with dignity and respect and this is part of our vision of how research excellence comes about. We value individual differences and the diversity that this brings and want to ensure that no-one is at a disadvantage – whether at application stage or as part of our cohort – because of who they are, and we undertake Positive Action to support that aim (<https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/guidance/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/equality-legislation/positive-action>). As part of our annual competition, we include a critical friend in the form of an EDI champion, who reviews our competition process, paperwork and outcomes to help us be as inclusive as we can be. We welcome all applicants irrespective of their gender, socio-economic background or ethnicity. We value and seek to include such diverse life experience and recognise the importance of it in developing excellent research. We explicitly encourage assessment panels to recognise this in their assessment of a candidate's preparedness for doctoral study.

All staff and applicants are expected to follow this guidance, which is outlined in the following sections:

1. [Eligibility and Financial Support Available](#)
2. [How Applicants Apply](#)
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1. Eligibility and Financial Support Available

The normal duration of an NBCDTP doctoral studentship is 42 months full-time or 84 months part-time. Once registered, award-holders may apply to extend their studentship in order to pursue an approved research training programme or to undertake a placement. Note, such an extension will not affect the maximum period of candidature and thesis submission date.

Applicants to the Standard PhD route **who have already commenced their doctoral studies** are eligible to apply providing they will have completed no more than 18 months of full-time or 36 months of part-time study by 1 October 2021. Those students should notify their supervisors and School/Department professional services staff as soon as possible and **before Wednesday 13 January 2021** to indicate they wish to be considered for nomination. Current PhD students are **not** required to submit another postgraduate application form to their institution, and should **not** contact the institution's Postgraduate Admissions Service.

Because of the nature of the CDA PhD, our CDA (Student-led) route is not open to year 2 entry unless the student is already engaged in a CDA-type project

As of 2020/21, all international students will be eligible to apply for NBC studentships, including EU and non-EU citizens. We currently have no specific guidance as to how this will work in practice and the exact level of financial support or number of studentships we will be able to offer students in this category. Please check our website for updates on this as we release them.

Competition for NBCDTP studentships is expected to be intense, and we require evidence of academic or research excellence at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, or in terms of professional practice and work experience, as well as evidence that the student has sufficient research skills to undertake the project. Where necessary, before awards are made, the NBCDTP may consult with an applicant and their proposed supervisors to ensure that they comply with AHRC's terms and conditions for award-holders.

Successful applicants will be eligible to apply for additional funding during the funded period of their studentship for the purposes of supporting their primary research costs and individual training needs. Details of this will be provided on their studentship offer letter and at the NBCDTP Autumn Conference, usually held in early November. Please note that the award of this additional funding is not an automatic entitlement: all applications will be reviewed by the academic directors to ensure that there is a persuasive academic rationale for undertaking the activity and that costs are adequately justified.

Up to 67 doctoral awards are available in the 2021 Studentship Competition across all partner institutions in the NBCDTP Consortium. It is expected that at least 20% of these will be allocated to Collaborative Doctoral Awards, including those that will be offered under the separate Collaborative Doctoral Awards (Project-led) competition.

The NBCDTP offers doctoral studentships only in the subject areas listed in [Annex 8](#).

Please note: PhD research in some of the above subject areas is also funded by the ESRC. Information on Subjects where the AHRC and the ESRC share interests and responsibilities is available in the AHRC's Research Funding Guide, Version 4.7 (June 2019), pp. 83-85. See: <https://ahrc.ukri.org/funding/research/researchfundingguide/>

The NBCDTP currently supports and continues to welcome applications for interdisciplinary research projects, including (i) those engaging with two arts and humanities subject areas (as listed in Annex 8) as well as (ii) those proposals that, while being led by arts and humanities approaches, engage with a STEM or social sciences discipline. We understand interdisciplinary research as being the integration of methodological approaches from two (or more) disciplines, generating outcomes that could not be achieved within a single discipline.

A project that uses linguistic analysis of language attitudes to explore and develop the design of language-learning apps for refugees is interdisciplinary according to this first definition. It integrates methodologies from two arts and humanities disciplines (Linguistics and Interaction Design) and would be assessed for its success in addressing those disciplines by the Linguistics and Design panels, and by the Interdisciplinary panel. It generates outcomes that *could not* be achieved within a single discipline. A project that makes significant use of research methods associated with economics as part of a broader study of popular music may also be interdisciplinary according to this second definition. It integrates methodologies from an arts and humanities discipline (music) and a social sciences discipline (economics) and would be assessed by the Music panel and by the Interdisciplinary panel. However, projects where the researcher reviews economic literature on popular music, but does not use methods of economic analysis as part of their original contribution, would not meet this definition. A project that explores Ghanaian literary culture of the 1990s, and in doing so draws on historical political material such as newspapers, is not interdisciplinary for the purposes of NBCDTP assessment. The *data* are often considered by different subjects, but the *methods* belong to a single discipline. The project outcomes *could* be achieved within a single discipline.

Interdisciplinary applications (two AHRC subject areas): Applicants must make it clear, in their application, how their project will integrate approaches from the two [Annex 8](#) subject areas they have identified. This will be confirmed by the Interdisciplinary Panel. Eligible applications will then be reviewed by both subject area panels and moderated by the Interdisciplinary Panel. The Interdisciplinary Panel may determine that an application is most appropriately reviewed as a single-area application rather than an interdisciplinary application, and routed to that panel for assessment.

Interdisciplinary applications (AHRC plus another area): A research project might integrate approaches from two or more disciplines, where only one of those disciplines is a subject area covered by the NBCDTP (see [Annex 8](#)). The project must fall predominantly within the arts and humanities (that is, at least 50%); this will be confirmed by the Interdisciplinary Panel. Applicants should identify the project as Interdisciplinary (identifying the non-AHRC discipline(s)), and provide an explanation on the application form. Eligible applications will be assessed by the [Annex 8](#) subject area panel and moderated by the Interdisciplinary Panel.

2. How Applicants Apply

Applicants can apply to only **one** of the seven universities in the NBCDTP. If their application is successful this will be their host institution and will hold their registration. However, applicants may apply to more than one DTP, including the ESRC Northern Ireland North East (NINE) Doctoral Training Partnership, which includes the same partner institutions.

It is vital that applicants to the Standard PhD route consult the relevant Subject Area Lead at the earliest opportunity so that the expertise and capacity to supervise the proposed research can be identified, and to ensure that the applicant will be fully supported throughout the competition process.

Applicants should also identify the member of professional services staff who has responsibility for the administration of the NBCDTP applicant selection and nomination within their School/Department at their host institution.

The NBCDTP also offers **student-led Collaborative Doctoral Awards**.

These differ from the standard awards in four main ways:

- the student identifies and approaches a suitable non-HE partner organisation as well as a potential supervisor at the preferred host institution in order to develop his/her own proposed project;
- responsibility for supervision and training is shared between the partner organisation and the university at which the applicant is registered;
- the project needs to be set up so that it generates benefits for the partner organisation as well as producing the outputs required for the award of a PhD;
- the student normally spends a substantial portion of the period of doctoral study at the partner organisation.

It is essential that conversations between prospective applicants, the partner organisation and the university supervisors begin at the earliest opportunity.

For all applicants to either route, there are two stages in the application process:

3. Stage One: Postgraduate Application (Online) (not applicable to currently registered doctoral students, see above.)

Applicants to both the Standard PhD and Collaborative Doctoral Award routes wishing to apply for a studentship must complete their chosen University's online postgraduate application form and submit it by **16:00 on Wednesday 13 January 2021**. All applicants must include the code **NBC21** on their application form so that it can be identified. Applicants to:

- **Durham University** under 'How do you propose to fund your studies?' please select "Northern Bridge AHRC studentship" from the drop-down menu.
- **Newcastle University** should quote NBC21 under 'Studentship/Partnership Reference' and 'Who is your sponsor/funding body?'
- **Northumbria University** should quote NBC21 under the 'Project/Studentship Reference Number' field.
- **Queen's University Belfast** should tick 'I will apply separately to an external body' then enter NBC21 under 'To which body do you intend to apply?'
- **University of Sunderland** must state the supervisor, and should state NBC21 in Section 6 'Who is expected to pay your fees.'
- **Teesside University** applicants should answer the question 'Who will pay your fees' by selecting 'other' and then quoting 'NBC21.'
- **Ulster University** Should insert NBC21 in response to the question 'If you will be self-funded or are in receipt of a private scholarship then please provide further information here' on the Funding Details section of the online application.'

(Please note: Independent of the NBCDTP Studentship Competition process, applicants must submit supporting documentation required by the partner institutions' Postgraduate Admissions Services. This is necessary to secure an offer of a place on the doctoral programme at the applicant's chosen institution, and must be in line with the institution's own admissions policies. Applicants may be requested, for example, to submit a Research Proposal of more than the NBCDTP requirement of 750 words, and should adhere to that requirement.)

Applicants are responsible for contacting their referees at the earliest opportunity using the email template supplied in [Annex 4](#) below. If you are returning to Higher Education after a period of professional practice or similar and are not able to draw on academic referees, please ensure that your chosen referees are able to comment on your research skills and preparedness for doctoral study.

Applicants are strongly urged to identify referees who are independent of their proposed supervisory team, but the most important consideration is that referees should be well placed to comment authoritatively on applicants' academic performance and/or preparedness for doctoral study in terms of research skills and experience. In some cases, the proposed supervisor(s) will be the most appropriate referees, and applicants will not be penalised if this is the case.

It is generally recommended that referees are advised to send references direct to the appropriate Postgraduate Admissions Service no later than **Wednesday 13 January 2021, by 16:00**. Where this is not possible, references should be sent to the appropriate School/Department administrator or supervisor (as directed), no later than **Wednesday 17 February 2021, by 16:00**. Schools/Departments are within their rights to request references by an earlier date.

4. Stage Two: Applicant Nomination

School/Department-based scrutiny panels then select their strongest nominees on the basis of the applicant's qualifications, research proposal, relevant experience and references - treating all applicants equitably and fairly in line with their University's Code of Admissions practice. Panels should use the "Marking Scheme and Assessment Criteria" provided in [Annex 3](#) when selecting their nominees. It is strongly recommended that Schools/Departments maintain a record of their decisions and reasons for the selection and rejection of applicants. (This information is **not** required by the NBCDTP, but recommended in the event of a Freedom of Information request.)

Schools/Departments are responsible for notifying both their successful and unsuccessful applicants at this stage.

Successful nominees will be invited by their School/Department to liaise with the appropriate members of staff to complete the Studentship Nomination Form.

During the Nomination stage of the process, **13 January – 17 February 2021**, it is strongly recommended that Schools/Departments encourage applicants and staff work to complete the Nomination Form as early as possible. The completion of the Nomination Form will be co-ordinated by subject areas within Schools/Departments who may set their own internal deadlines for the completion of the two parts of the Nomination Form.

Applicants should note that the institutional NBCDTP Academic Directors and Administrators are not responsible for the selection of nominees and cannot advise on whether an applicant has been selected to go through to the nomination stage.

5. Completing the Nomination Form

Please read the guidance below on how to complete each section of the Nomination Form, and what information the assessors require.

PART 1: TO BE COMPLETED BY THE NOMINEE:

Proposed supervisors and other School/Department staff may provide guidance to assist the applicant but this part of the form must be the applicant's own work.

SECTION 1: NOMINEE DETAILS AND ELIGIBILITY

The AHRC seeks demographic statistics on studentship nominees, (Gender Identity, Date of Birth, Ethnicity and Disability). Please provide the requested information which will be used only for anonymised, annual reporting to the AHRC and the NBCDTP Operations Committee.

Residency status: The information required will be used to assess whether an applicant is eligible for funding, and if an applicant is eligible for a full award (fees and stipend) or a fees-only award. Please provide full and accurate information as the NBCDTP will base their decision on the applicant's eligibility on the details provided **at the time of nomination** to the NBCDTP for consideration by its Studentship Committee. Applicants may be disqualified if found to be ineligible based on the information provided here, and the Committee will **not** consider subsequent amendments to this information following the confirmation of the outcome of the Studentship Competition.

Please note, that in accordance with the "Changes to EU and International Eligibility for UKRI funded studentships from Academic Year 2021/22 onwards," a UK national who has spent an extended period living outside the UK, either for study or employment, will be required to show that they have maintained a relevant connection with the UK, so that a claim to Home fees status can be assessed. 'Temporary' does not depend solely on the length of absence.

SECTION 2: AWARD, UNIVERSITY AND SUBJECT AREA DETAILS

In Section 2, applicants are asked to provide the subject area for their proposed research, with reference to the subject list set out above. This ensures that the proposal is evaluated by staff with the requisite subject expertise. Many proposals will be interdisciplinary, but still fall within the purview of a single subject. If, however, the proposed project is interdisciplinary in a way described in the definition of interdisciplinarity above, the applicant should list **one additional** subject area in the space provided so that the proposal can be evaluated by the Interdisciplinary Panel.

If the proposal includes a creative practice element, (a novel, composition, production of fine art, etc.), please indicate it here.

SECTION 3: HIGHER EDUCATION TO DATE RELEVANT TO THIS NOMINATION

Please provide the details requested. Applicants are reminded that for taught postgraduate and undergraduate awards they must provide a full transcript, translated into English where necessary. Applicants currently completing a taught postgraduate programme must provide a provisional transcript listing their modules and marks received to-date. Current PhD applicants should use this section to provide details of their programme. Should an applicant hold more than one undergraduate and/or postgraduate degree, they should list the most relevant to the nomination and subject of the research proposal.

SECTION 4A: PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE RELEVANT TO THIS NOMINATION

SECTION 4B: PUBLICATIONS, EXHIBITIONS, COMMISSIONS, etc. RELEVANT TO THIS NOMINATION

Please provide the details requested, and only experience most relevant to the nomination.

The list of additional information (4b) can include, for example, exhibitions, shows, work in galleries, awards, commissions, residencies, publications, conference papers. These should be relevant to your research proposal and not otherwise mentioned on the nomination, and the list **no more than one A4 page**.

SECTION 5A: RESEARCH PROPOSAL AND CASE FOR SUPPORT:

STANDARD PHD NOMINEES

The 100-word summary of the proposal should be written in such a way as to be accessible to a reader who may not be a subject specialist. This summary will be provided to the AHRC should the nomination be successful, and (anonymously) to NBCDTP non-HE Strategic Partners.

The following requirements are stipulated by the AHRC, and sets out the AHRC's definition of research. In order for the project to be eligible for funding by the NBCDTP, it must:

1. Define a series of **research questions**, issues or problems that will be addressed in the course of the research. It must also define its aims and objectives in terms of seeking to enhance knowledge and understanding relating to the questions, issues or problems to be addressed.
2. Specify a **research context** for the questions, issues or problems to be addressed. You must specify why it is important that these particular questions, issues or problems should be addressed; what other research is being or has been conducted in this area; and what particular contribution this project will make to the advancement of creativity, insights, knowledge and understanding in this area.
3. Specify the **research methods** for addressing and answering the research questions, issues or problems. You must state how, in the course of the research project, you will seek to answer the questions, address the issues or solve the problems. You should also explain the rationale for your chosen research methods and why you think they provide the most appropriate means by which to address the research questions, issues or problems.

Our primary concern is to ensure that the research we fund addresses clearly-articulated research questions, issues or problems, set in a clear context of other research in that area, and using appropriate research methods and/or approaches.

Applicants in the domains of creative practice are reminded that their proposed research projects must adhere to the foregoing criteria:

*Creative output can be produced, or practice undertaken, as an integral part of a research process as defined above. The Council would expect, however, this practice to be accompanied by some form of documentation of the research process, as well as some form of textual analysis or explanation to support its position and as a record of your critical reflection. Equally, creativity or practice may involve no such process at all, in which case **it would be ineligible for funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Council.***

Source:

<https://ahrc.ukri.org/funding/research/researchfundingguide/introduction/definitionofresearch/>

The proposal is strictly limited to 750 words. Do **not** include a bibliography or footnotes. A brief note of the reference (*Smith, 1990*) is sufficient as the proposal will be considered by experts familiar with the literature.

Applicants should explain how their past qualifications and/or professional experience have equipped them with the research skills and knowledge base that will allow them to undertake their proposed research project. If an applicant is applying for a PhD after a period in professional practice or similar, it is essential that they explain how their professional experience has equipped them with the high-level research skills necessary for doctoral research.

Applicants should identify the resources and facilities that will be used during the research project, where are they located, and how will they be accessed. High cost fieldwork, training (for example, immersive difficult language training), or specialist equipment requirements, etc., that the applicant anticipates will be necessary for the successful completion of the thesis should also be identified here. Applicants are expected to consult their prospective supervisors about the availability of key resources and the likely costs of research and training activities in order to ensure the viability of their proposed research project. Estimates should be provided of any supplementary funding that may be required to bring the project to successful completion, and an explanation of how these additional costs will be met. **It should not be assumed that such costs will be met by the NBCDTP, nor by the applicant's institution; such additional funding is not guaranteed.**

Applicants should also explain why the project is particularly suited to the NBCDTP. In answering this question, they may wish to consider the expertise of their supervisors, the resources available within the NBCDTP universities, specific training provision, and the relevance of the Strategic Partners. Applicants are strongly encouraged to consider the placement opportunities available through the NBCDTP Strategic Partners. Applicants should use this section to indicate if they have already established with their supervisory team that their studentship will include a placement or placements with either a Strategic Partner or another non-HEI partner. However, applicants who have not secured a placement will not be penalised.

**SECTION 5B: RESEARCH PROPOSAL AND CASE FOR SUPPORT:
COLLABORATIVE DOCTORAL AWARDS NOMINEES**

As well as the information required above (Section 5A), please identify in your Case for Support:

- Intrinsic benefits: how will the research field produce insights and knowledge that will help the organisation achieve its objectives?
- “Process” benefits: how will the partner organisation benefit from the *process* of you undertaking the research project, informally and/or through the completion of specific tasks (e.g. cataloguing of collections, knowledge exchange with staff)?
- Public engagement benefits: what kind of research outcomes will generate ‘content’ for the partner organisation to use in their public engagement work (e.g. material for exhibition)?

PROJECT FEASIBILITY AND THE PANDEMIC

Applicants are asked to confirm that they have discussed with their proposed supervisors if they would be able to adjust and revise their project plans if current/future restrictions are imposed due to the pandemic. These might include issues such as: travel restrictions, closure of institutions such as libraries, museums, laboratories, other research facilities and extensive periods of working from home. We do not expect applicants to have developed a full ‘Plan B’ but given the likely longevity of the pandemic, we would like to see evidence that your project can be adjusted if necessary and would remain feasible.

SECTION 6: SAMPLE OF PRACTICE-BASED OUTPUTS

Applicants nominated in **Creative Practice-based areas only** are required to supply a URL to a portfolio of outputs which may be accessed by assessors for contextual information only; this will **not** form part of the formal assessment documentation. The portfolio is not an extra quality check but rather allows applicants to demonstrate how their creative work represents an appropriate methodology for addressing their research questions and their preparedness for doctoral study. It is important that they also articulate the methodological value of creative practice in Section 6 of the Nomination Form. Subject Area Leads considering nominations in these subject areas may consult the portfolios for information. However, their assessment must be based on and justified with reference to the case presented in the Nomination Form, transcripts and references.

NOMINEE DECLARATION

Please sign and date. Electronic signatures are acceptable. Please note that nominees are also required to read and sign the NBCDTP Data Processing Agreement at the end of the Nomination Form.

PART 2: TO BE COMPLETED BY THE NOMINEE’S SCHOOL OR DEPARTMENT

This part of the form, on supervision, training and development and research environment, is to be completed by the School/Department, and in the case of Collaborative Doctoral Awards, also the partner organisation.

SECTION 7: SUPERVISION

Please include:

- Details of the supervisors' track record of postgraduate student supervision;
- Relevant publications;
- Any involvement in postgraduate training;
- Relevant web-links to staff profiles and publications.

The NBCDTP is also committed to supporting students who are jointly supervised by academic staff from more than one institution in the NBCDTP. Where a successful candidate is supported by a supervisory team that crosses institutional boundaries, the main and second supervisors must be at the host institution, with the third advisor from another institution. In certain, exceptional cases it may be appropriate for there to be a fourth advisor from another institution as well. Please note that it is **not** a requirement that an applicant has cross-institutional supervision.

SECTION 8: TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

- Explain the nominee's training and development needs, highlighting specific advanced/specialist courses that may be relevant, and state how these needs will be addressed.
- Prospective supervisors must confirm that any supplementary costs involved in undertaking fundamental research or in meeting the applicant's training needs are realistic and justified. They should explain how these costs will be met, bearing in mind that the funding for research and training activities from Northern Bridge is necessarily limited. It should not be assumed that such costs will be met by Northern Bridge, nor by the applicant's institution; such additional funding is not guaranteed.

SECTION 9: RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT

- Explain how the nominee will be integrated into the research environment in his/her field. Include details of how the research strengths of the subject in the Department/School, as well as any interdisciplinary research groups, clusters, Centres, and Institutes, specialised facilities/resources, and external partnerships, are relevant to and/or will contribute to the completion of the nominee's research project.

- Collaborative Doctoral Awards Only: Also outline the contribution of the collaboration and the value added to the nominee's research project, including the arrangements for support of the nominee by the partner; and any previous experience of collaboration with the partner. Include details of how the nominee will be integrated into the culture of the partner organisation, and the specialised facilities/resources they will benefit from.

SECTION 10: SUBMISSION

Applicants are responsible for ensuring that they forward the completed Part 1 of the form to their School/Department in time to enable staff in subject areas to complete Part 2. Schools/Departments may implement an internal deadline at their discretion for that purpose, but should ensure that nominees are made aware of that deadline.

Schools/Departments are responsible for submitting the Nomination Form to: northernbridge.admin@newcastle.ac.uk by 16:00 on Wednesday 17 February 2021 copying in their local NBCDTP administrator listed below.

Incomplete nominations will not be considered under any circumstances.

Attachments received after the deadline will not be accepted.

Full nominations received after the deadline will not be considered under any circumstances.

Each School / Department should attach to the NBDTP's Nomination Form the following documents, in the following order:

Attachment 1	A Maximum of Two References.
Attachment 2	Undergraduate and Postgraduate Transcripts (not Degree Certificates). Current Masters students must provide evidence of provisional marks / marks received to date.
Attachment 3	Collaborative Doctoral Awards Only: A letter from the partner organisation confirming that they support the nominee, and are committed to providing the support outlined in Sections 8, 9 and 10 above.

The full nomination should be submitted as one complete PDF in the order above and named according to the following convention:

ApplicantSurname+Initial_SubjectArea_Institution, e.g: SmithJ_Linguistics_QUB.

6. Assessment

Nominations to the NBCDTP Studentship Competition will be assessed strictly according to the following criteria:

- The quality of the applicant, including their past academic and/or professional performance and experience, likely future performance, and their preparedness for doctoral study in terms of relevant research skills and experience.
- The quality of the research proposal, including the clarity and cogency of the research questions, awareness of relevant research in the field, the sources to be used, and the appropriateness of the proposed approach / methodology.
- The coherence, importance, and viability of the proposed research, and in particular the feasibility of completion within 42 months (or 84 months part-time).
- The fit of the supervisory team, including supervisors' subject expertise in relation to the proposed research; ability to develop students' skills and professional competence; past success in supervising students, and any involvement in postgraduate training. In identifying supervisory teams, applicants and supervisors should consider the full spectrum of expertise available across the NBCDTP.
- A detailed account of how the specific training and development needs of the applicant will be met.
- Quality of the research environment across the NBCDTP, in terms of School/ Departmental research strengths, interdisciplinary research groups, clusters, Centres, Institutes, and external partnerships, as well as the ways in which the applicant will be integrated into this environment.

In addition to the above, Collaborative Doctoral Award nominations will be assessed according to 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 the specific training and development needs of the applicant.
- Quality of the research environment, in terms of research priorities, facilities and resources at the Partner organisation.

The Marking Scheme and Assessment Criteria used by Subject Area Contacts are provided in [Annex 3](#).

7. Selection Arrangements and Making Awards

The Nomination Forms will be assessed by Subject Area Panels chaired by the Subject Area Leads in a minimum of four partner institutions.

In agreeing to participate as a Subject Area Lead and panel member, academic colleagues are confirming that they will be available to review nominations over the period **Thursday 18 February to Wednesday 17 March 2021**.

Panel members will grade each Nomination Form in their subject area and the Subject Area Lead is asked to return those marks, on behalf of the panel, along with a short explanatory comment to northernbridge.admin@newcastle.ac.uk by **16:00, Wednesday 17 March 2021**. Further details are provided in the Guidance for Subject Area Leads and Panel Members in [Annex 6](#).

For subject areas to which a nomination for a Collaborative Doctoral Award nomination has been submitted, Subject Area Leads can consult or co-opt to the panel a member of staff within their discipline with the relevant experience in collaborative PhDs.

Where a student has stated that their proposal is interdisciplinary in a way that crosses two AHRC subject areas, (applicants can select no more than two), their nomination will be assessed by both Subject Area panels independently, and then moderated by a specially convened Interdisciplinary Panel, comprising academic colleagues, cross-consortium, with expertise in interdisciplinarity studies and chaired by an independent member of staff not involved in the review process.

Following receipt of the marks and comments from the Subject Area Leads, the marks produced will be collated to produce an initial ranking of the nominations. The scores will be considered by a Moderation Sub-committee to ensure consistency, and to confirm a final ranked list of all nominations for consideration by the Studentships Committee. In exceptional circumstances, the Moderation Sub-committee may seek external advice if they judge it appropriate to do so.

Following the moderation and ranking, the nominations will be reviewed by a Studentship Committee consisting of the NBCDTP Academic Directors; EDI, Interdisciplinary, Collaborative Doctoral Award, and Creative Practice Champions, and an Academic Representative from each of the AHRC's three Disciplinary Clusters. The Studentship Committee will confirm the final rankings from which the awards will be made and identify a list of candidates to be placed on a reserve list

The outcome of the Studentship Competition will be communicated to applicants **from Thursday 15 April 2021** (subject to individual institutional processes) by the relevant department in the applicant's **host institution**.

In cases where successful applicants choose not to accept an offer of a studentship, the next highest-ranked applicant on the reserve list will be contacted and made an offer of an award.

Annex 1: The Studentship Competition Timeline

End of September 2020	Subject Areas Leads confirmed for the 2020/2021 competition
1 October 2020	Studentship Competition launches
1 October 2020	Advertising campaign launches
<i>Prospective applicants make their initial approach to the appropriate Subject Area contacts</i>	
TBC - Various Dates October 2020	Northern Bridge Consortium Launch Events (Virtual)
TBC - Various Dates October 2020	Application Masterclasses (Virtual)
Wednesday 13 January 2021, by 16:00	Deadline for the submission of postgraduate application forms
Wednesday 13 January 2021, by 16:00	Deadline for currently registered, eligible, postgraduate research students to make their schools/departments aware they would like to be considered for an award
<i>Subject areas work with their strongest applicants to complete the NBCDTP Nomination Form</i>	
Wednesday 17 February 2021, by 16:00	Deadline for the submission of Nomination Forms to the NBCDTP
Thursday 18 February 2021	NBCDTP Nomination Forms made available to the relevant panels for assessment
<i>Nomination Form assessment period</i>	
Wednesday 17 March 2021, by 16:00	Deadline for the submission of all panel scores and comments to the NBCDTP
<i>Results collated and made available to the NBCDTP Moderation Sub-committee</i>	
Thursday 25 March 2021	Moderation by the NBCDTP Moderation Sub-committee
<i>Results and documentation made available to members of the Studentships Committee (Awards)</i>	
Monday 12 April 2021	Meeting of the NBCDTP Studentships Committee (Awards)
From Thursday 15 April 2021 (subject to individual institutional processes)	Results announced
<i>Studentship offer letters issued to successful nominees</i>	
Successful candidates are expected to accept (or decline) their award within two weeks of notification of the outcome	

Annex 2: Frequently Asked Questions

Am I eligible to apply for a Studentship award?

Eligibility criteria are set out in the Training Grant Terms and Conditions, available at:
<https://www.ukri.org/funding/information-for-award-holders/grant-terms-and-conditions/>

Your University guidance asks for a research proposal of 2,000 words, yet your documentation asks for 750 words. How long does my research proposal need to be?

Your research proposal submitted via the University online application should be in line with your institution's own Postgraduate Admissions policy. You should be prepared to adapt your research proposal to fit the 750 word requirement for the NBCDTP Nomination Form.

Can I submit documents after the deadlines?

No documents will be accepted after the deadlines. Incomplete applications will be disqualified.

Can I attach a personal statement to my NBCDTP Nomination Form?

No personal statements, covering letters or additional information will be accepted. They will be removed from your nomination before it is assessed.

When should I contact a potential supervisor?

It is in your interest to contact a potential supervisor as quickly as possible. It is our experience that stronger applications tend to come from applicants who begin these discussions as early in the competition as possible.

One of my referees is not available for a few months due to international fieldwork. What should I do?

It is your responsibility to ensure that your referees are in a position to respond to your reference request quickly. Please contact them using the email template provided in [Annex 4](#) before submitting your application to ensure that they are in a position to supply a reference no later than **Wednesday 17 February 2021, by 16:00**, (or earlier, as Schools/Departments can set their own deadlines for the completion of the Nomination Form and the receipt of references). Nomination Forms which are not accompanied by two references will be disqualified.

Where can I get a copy of the Nomination Form to complete?

Successful applicants who are to be nominated by their School/Department to Stage Two of the competition will be provided with a copy of the Nomination Form directly.

I have already applied to your University and now want to be considered for the competition. What can I do?

Contact the Subject Area Lead and professional services contact in your School/Department as soon as possible, and before **Wednesday 13 January 2020, 16:00**, to advise that you wish to be considered for nomination.

I am already in the first year of my PhD. Can I be considered for an award?

See Page 2 of these Guidance Notes.

Can my potential supervisor also act as my referee?

See Page 5 of these Guidance Notes.

I'm unable to provide a copy of my undergraduate/postgraduate transcript due to the length of time that has lapsed since my degree / closure of the awarding institution, etc.

You should provide a copy of your degree certificate, and – if possible – you should secure a referee who can comment on your academic performance and/or professional experience and expertise.

Annex 3: Marking Scheme and Assessment Criteria

The criteria to be used to evaluate applications are indicated below. Assessors should be aware of, and sympathetic to, the fact that applicants will come from a diverse range of backgrounds, including those with experience in practice or industry. NBCDTP is fully committed to the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion agenda, and is actively supporting the diversification of its staff and student cohort. It asks Subject Area Panels to be particularly aware of issues around Widening Participation and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion when making assessments on the quality of nominations as a whole and particularly the Applicant section. We also ask assessors to be open-minded about different research approaches and perspectives within subject areas and that each application is assessed on its own academic merits. We would also ask individual assessors to ensure they have no conflict of interest with individual applications and if there are, to refrain from being part of the assessment of those individual applications.

Assessors are asked to grade and comment on four aspects of the application: The Applicant (12), the Research Proposal (12), Supervision (6), Training and Development and Research Environment (6), giving an aggregate score out of 36. Applications that score below 6/12 (or 3/6) in any area will automatically be considered ineligible for funding.

Applicant

In assessing the suitability of the applicant for an NBCDTP doctoral award, assessors should consider the following:

- Are the applicant's previous qualifications or evidence of professional practice of a sufficiently high standard, and are they appropriate to the proposed research?
- Does the application include evidence of the applicant's first degree result and MA marks (if available) or comments in references on performance at masters level or equivalent? Does it include evidence of relevant professional practice or work experience which points to preparedness for PhD-level study?
- Has the panel considered and taken into account the EDI and Widening Participation aims of NBCDTP when making its assessments?
- Do referees focus on the particular abilities of the candidate that make them suitable for postgraduate research, and do they support the applicant unreservedly?

A weak testimonial will indicate significant problems, omit to address key issues, or provide 'stock' or general replies with little detail, for example, on previous marks.

Competition for NBCDTP studentships is expected to be intense, and we require evidence of academic or research excellence at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, or in terms of professional practice and work experience, as well as evidence that the student has sufficient research skills to undertake the project.

Grade	Descriptor
12	An outstanding applicant: full evidence is provided of exceptional past academic, practice or professional achievement and potential to undertake original independent research, and excellent preparedness for doctoral study. To be funded as a matter of utmost priority.
11	
10	A very strong candidate: excellence is fully evidenced in terms of academic, practice or professional achievement and potential, and a very high level of preparedness for doctoral study. To be funded as a matter of priority, though does not merit the highest priority rating.
9	
8	

7	A strong applicant, with evidence of very good past academic, practice or professional performance and potential, and a high level of preparedness for doctoral study. Deserving of consideration for funding.
6	A solid applicant: evidence of good past academic, practice or professional achievement and potential is provided, and the candidate is reasonably well prepared for doctoral study. But in the highly competitive context of the NBCDTP competition not possible to be considered for funding.
5	
4	An applicant with some strengths but about whom there are reservations concerning past academic, practice or professional achievements, potential for original independent research, or preparedness for doctoral study. Not recommended for funding.
3	
2	An applicant who falls significantly short of the expected standards in one or more areas. Not suitable for funding.
1	

Research Proposal

In assessing the quality of the Case for Support, assessors should consider the following:

- Research question(s), issue(s) or problem(s). Are the research question(s) or problem(s) clearly defined? How important is it that these questions should be addressed?
- 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 questions? Is the research likely to raise ethical or safety issues, and if so, are these addressed in the proposal?
- The practical viability of the project. Does the candidate 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?

A strong application will have a well-defined proposal, researchable questions and a feasible timetable, and the applicant will have identified relevant sources, an appropriate approach / methodology, will show awareness of the research context and the significance of their proposed contribution to the field. The research proposal should also build on the applicant's background. A weak application would have less well-defined research questions, an insufficient awareness of the research context, an underdeveloped approach / methodology and have given less attention to the practicalities of conducting the research in a timely manner.

Grade	Descriptor
12	An outstanding research proposal. Research questions/ 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, as well as a compelling case for its intellectual importance. The methodology is appropriate, and the research is thoroughly feasible within the period of supervised study. Any ethical/ safety issues have been identified and appropriately addressed. To be funded as a matter of the highest priority.
11	

10	A very strong proposal. Research questions are clear and cogent, the applicant has a keen awareness of the research context and a sense of the contribution that the research will make, and makes a very strong case for its intellectual importance. The methodology is appropriate, and the research is likely to be feasible within the period of supervised study. Any ethical/ safety issues have been identified and appropriately addressed. To be funded as a matter of priority, but does not merit the highest priority rating.
9	
8	A strong proposal: research questions are clear, and the applicant demonstrates awareness of the research context, the contribution that the proposed research will make, and makes a strong case for its intellectual importance. The research is probably feasible within the period of supervised study. Any ethical/ safety issues have been identified and appropriately addressed. Worthy of consideration for funding.
7	
6	A solid proposal: research questions are identified, and the proposal demonstrates some awareness of the research context, and the contribution the research will make. There is some awareness of its intellectual importance. The research may be feasible within the period of supervised study, and ethical/ safety issues have been identified. In the competitive context of the NBCDTP not possible to be considered for funding.
5	
4	A proposal with some strong aspects, but with weaknesses in one or more of the following areas: research questions/ problems, awareness of research context, contribution to the discipline, intellectual significance, methodology, feasibility, or ethical/ safety considerations. Not recommended for funding.
3	
2	A proposal with serious shortcomings in one or more areas. Not suitable for funding.
1	

Supervision

This section of the Nomination Form should comment on the suitability of the supervisory team, noting research expertise and publications that are relevant to the student's project, the supervisors' previous track record of successful supervision and any involvement in postgraduate training. It is important to demonstrate not just the quality of the supervisors' research, but the fit of the student and project with the supervisors' areas of expertise. When considering the supervisory team, and training and development requirements, Schools/Departments are strongly advised to look beyond their own institution in order to identify possibilities for cross-Consortium supervision.

A strong application will be where the supervisors have expertise in an area closely related to the student's 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 nomination where they add value. In a weak application the supervisor will not be expert in the area.

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

Grade	Descriptor
6	An outstandingly close fit between supervisory expertise and the proposed project, and an excellent track record commensurate with the supervisors' career stage. To be funded as a matter of the highest priority. <i>Expertise of the Partner organisation supervisors is excellent, and very closely aligned with the needs of the project and student.</i>

5	A very strong fit between supervisory expertise and the proposed project and a strong track record commensurate with the supervisors' career stage. To be funded as a priority, though does not merit the highest priority rating. <i>Expertise of the Partner organisation supervisors is fully appropriate and well aligned with the needs of the project and student.</i>
4	A strong supervisory fit. Worthy of consideration for funding. <i>Expertise of the Partner organisation supervisors is appropriate and reasonably well aligned with the needs of the project and student.</i>
3	A good supervisory fit, but may lack a track record of supervision. In the competitive context of the NBCDTP competition, not possible to be considered for funding. <i>Expertise of the Partner organisation supervisors is acceptable, but may not be aligned with the needs of the project and student.</i>
2	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 supervisors is below an acceptable standard, and not aligned with the needs of the project and student.</i>
1	Significant shortcomings in one or more areas; not suitable for funding.

Training and Research Environment

The nomination should address the ways in which the research strengths of the subject in the Department/School, as well as any interdisciplinary research groups, clusters, Centres, and Institutes, specialised facilities/ resources, and external partnerships are relevant to the applicant's research project. The ways in which the applicant will be integrated into this environment should be specified. This section of the Nomination Form should also identify any skills training and professional development needed for the successful completion of the research project. This should be specific to the student and his/her project; please do not include general statements about the generic skills training available within the NBCDTP. When considering training and development requirements, Schools/ Departments are strongly 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 the student's 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 nomination where appropriate. In a weak application the Department/School or partner organisation will not be suited 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 training needs of the applicant, which may constrain their ability to conduct the research. A weaker application may also be ignorant of the relevant research environment, resources, and training opportunities elsewhere in the NBCDTP.

The Descriptors below also includes criteria pertinent to Collaborative Doctoral Awards (Student-led) in italics:

Grade	Descriptor
6	Compelling evidence that the student will be well integrated into appropriate research groups/ clusters/ Centres/ Institutes, and a clear sense that his/her training and development needs have been fully considered. To be funded as a matter of the highest priority. <i>Compelling evidence that the student will be well integrated into the research environment of the Partner organisation. There is a clear sense that the development opportunities offered by the Partner organisation are outstanding.</i>

5	<p>Evidence that the student will be integrated into appropriate research groups/ clusters/ Centres/ Institutes. Most of the student's training and development needs have been considered. To be funded as a priority, though does not merit the highest priority rating.</p> <p><i>Evidence that the student will be integrated into the research environment of the Partner organisation. The development opportunities offered by the Partner organisation are very good.</i></p>
4	<p>A sense that the student will be integrated into appropriate research groups/ clusters/ Centres/ Institutes. Some of the student's training and development needs have been considered. Worthy of consideration for funding.</p> <p><i>A sense that the student will be integrated into the research environment of the Partner organisation. The Partner organisation offers some appropriate development opportunities.</i></p>
3	<p>Evidence that there are research groups/ clusters/ Centres/ Institutes into which the student may be integrated. Training needs have been addressed, but cursorily. In the competitive context of the NBCDTP competition, not possible to be considered for funding.</p> <p><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>
2	<p>A research environment that has some strengths, but with weaknesses in respect of; school/ departmental research strengths and/or interdisciplinary infrastructure. Insufficient attention given to research training needs. Not appropriate for funding.</p> <p><i>Involvement of the Partner organisation in terms of research environment and development opportunities is inadequate.</i></p>
1	<p>Significant shortcomings in one or more areas; not suitable for funding.</p>

Annex 4: Email Template to Send to Referees

Applicants are responsible for making contact with their prospective referees at the earliest opportunity, and ensuring that they are available to provide references during the application and selection period. It is also important that references explicitly address applicants' suitability for doctoral research. The following is a suggested email that applicants can amend as appropriate for use when contacting referees.

Dear xxxx

I am applying for a PhD at [Institution], and for PhD funding from the AHRC-funded Northern Bridge Consortium Doctoral Training Partnership (www.northernbridge.ac.uk).

I am writing to ask if I might name you as one of my nominated referees. References will be required by **Wednesday 17 February 2021, 16:00**, at the latest, and may be requested earlier*. If you are available to write a reference, the Northern Bridge Consortium ask you to address the following:

- Details about how long you have known me and in what capacity.
- Comments on my academic performance to date, and/or on my performance in any post or position of responsibility.
- Comments on my predicted master's result, including information on individual modules where relevant.
- My preparedness for doctoral research, including research skills, and the likelihood of timely completion of my project.

With many thanks in advance for your help,

Yours sincerely

** Schools / Departments can set their own deadlines for the completion of the two parts of the Nomination Form and the receipt of references, which is likely to be much earlier than 17 February 2021. All nominees should first check with their School/Department at the earliest opportunity.*

Annex 5: Further Information and Contact Details

Arts and Humanities Research Council: <https://ahrc.ukri.org/skills/phdstudents/>

Northern Bridge Consortium Doctoral Training Partnership: www.northernbridge.ac.uk

Includes information for applicants as well as contact details for Subject Area Leads and Professional Services Staff in each subject area in each NBCDTP institution.

Local NBCDTP Administrator Contact Details:

Durham University	northernbridge.admin@durham.ac.uk
Newcastle University	northernbridge.admin@newcastle.ac.uk
Northumbria University	northernbridge.admin@northumbria.ac.uk
University of Sunderland	faci-research@sunderland.ac.uk
Teesside University	research@tees.ac.uk
Queen's University Belfast	northernbridge.admin@qub.ac.uk
Ulster University	northernbridge.admin@ulster.ac.uk

Local NBCDTP Academic Director Contact Details:

Durham University	northernbridge.director@durham.ac.uk
Newcastle University	NorthernBridgeDirector@newcastle.ac.uk
Northumbria University	David.Stewart@northumbria.ac.uk
University of Sunderland	beryl.graham@sunderland.ac.uk
Teesside University	N.Copsey@tees.ac.uk
Queen's University Belfast	northernbridge.director@qub.ac.uk
Ulster University	k.fleming@ulster.ac.uk

Annex 6: Guidance for Subject Area Leads and Panel Members

The Role of the Subject Area Lead

The NBCDTP is committed to making awards to the best students, based on the quality of their nomination form and supporting documentation. Each Subject Area Lead at each relevant institution is asked to organise and chair a panel that will scrutinise **all the nominations in their subject area from across the NBCDTP - not just those nominations from their own institution**, and evaluate the nominations according to the assessment criteria (see above). Nominations are graded, and the marks, plus supporting comments, are submitted to northernbridge.admin@newcastle.ac.uk.

There will be a maximum set of seven marks per nominee and a minimum of four, according to the density of subject coverage across the seven NBCDTP institutions.

Marks are then aggregated, and used to produce an initial ranked list, which is then moderated by the Moderation Sub-committee and presented to the Studentships Committee, which is the body that makes the final decision on awards.

Composition of the Subject Area Panel

Subject Area Leads are asked to form a Subject Area Panel comprising themselves and two subject area specialists from within their own institution. In the event that the Lead cannot participate, an alternative member of staff can join the panel – one member of which must agree to act as Chair. The composition of the panel should reflect institutional policies on equality, diversity and inclusion, and the NBCDTP recommends the inclusion of an Early Career Researcher alongside more experienced academics, where possible.

Panels that are likely to receive **Creative Practice** nominations should ensure that at least one member is a practice-based researcher who is familiar with the relevant discipline.

All reviewers are expected to have awareness of their university's individual policies regarding equality, diversity and inclusion.

By agreeing to serve as a Subject Area Lead or Panel member, colleagues are confirming that they will be available to review nominations over the period **Wednesday 17 February to Wednesday 17 March 2021**.

The name of the Panel members must be submitted to the NBCDTP via their local NBCDTP administrator by **Wednesday 30 September 2021**.

During the assessment period, the Lead/Chair may choose to get advice on individual nominations from other colleagues, co-opted into the panel, particularly where more specialist knowledge is required or where the panel has received a student-led **Collaborative Doctoral Award** nomination(s).

The Subject Area Lead/Chair will be responsible for returning their grades and comments to the relevant NBCDTP Administrator.

Interdisciplinary Nominations

The Nomination Form allows nominees to state whether their research is **interdisciplinary** in a way that crosses a maximum of two subject areas in which the NBCDTP offers studentships. Each interdisciplinary application will be sent to the indicated subject areas to be assessed and then later moderated by a special interdisciplinary panel.

Subject Area Coverage

Each nomination must be evaluated by a minimum of four Subject Area Panels across the NBCDTP. It may, in some cases, therefore be necessary for the Academic Directors and NBCDTP Administrators to approach members of staff in their institution to ask them to convene a panel in a subject area not normally represented by that institution.

Evaluation of Nominations

Nominations should be evaluated and graded according to the published criteria (see above). Please note that Collaborative Doctoral Award nominations should be assessed according to a slightly different set of criteria relating to supervision, research environment, and training. (Applicant and Project criteria are the same for all awards.)

When scrutinising nominations, consider the documentation provided in the nomination form and other relevant and publicly available details about, for example, potential supervisors' research expertise.

Grades should be explained in your comments, which should be sufficiently extensive for the Academic Directors and members of the Studentships Committee to understand how your mark was arrived at. Comments should address all four areas in which you are invited to grade the nomination: applicant, project, supervision, and training and development, and should be based on the published assessment criteria. Please ensure that your comments match the grade descriptors for the mark you award. Because of the value of the award, it is essential that a robust rationale underpins all our decisions.

The Grading of Applicants

The grading of applicants, like all other aspects of the NBCDTP evaluation process, ultimately depends on your academic judgement as a Subject Area Lead and panel member. Given the variety of backgrounds and qualifications of NBCDTP nominees, it is impossible to be prescriptive. While formal academic qualifications are extremely important indicators of academic achievement and potential, there will always be applicants with unconventional profiles that will need to be assessed on their own merits. As a hypothetical example, we might have a nomination from a mature applicant whose undergraduate degree, a 2:2 in Biochemistry, was awarded 25 years ago, but who has had a distinguished career as a bioarchaeologist with publications in major journals. Another hypothetical example might be a Creative Practice applicant whose undergraduate degree, a 2:2 in Philosophy, was awarded 15-20 years ago, but whose profile combines a distinguished career of creative arts practice, and other professional practice or work experience.

This document offers some indicative examples of applicant profiles that might typically attract specific applicant scores. They cannot hope to be exhaustive, and are not intended to be prescriptive or to be applied mechanically; they simply outline the kind of qualification profile that we might expect nominees to demonstrate in order to obtain specific applicant scores. They are offered as orientation, but are not intended as a substitute for your academic judgement.

A Note on Prizes

Prizes and other accolades may be evidence of excellence, but their absence does not imply a lack of excellence, since not all universities award prizes. They should be taken as corroborating rather than substantive evidence.

Conflicts of Interest

It is entirely possible that Subject Area Leads or panel members could find themselves considering a Nomination in which one of them is named as a potential supervisor. In such cases, and any other cases where there is a potential conflict of interest, the nomination should be assessed by an alternative subject-specialist colleague.

A Note on References and Referees

The above Guidance states:

“Applicants are strongly urged to identify referees who are independent of their proposed supervisory team, but the most important consideration is that referees should be well placed to comment authoritatively on applicants’ academic performance and/or preparedness for doctoral study in terms of research skills and experience. In some cases, the proposed supervisor(s) will be the most appropriate referees, and applicants will not be penalised if this is the case.”

Please be aware that for some students, the potential supervisor is the best or only viable referee, and in such cases the judgement of the referee should be respected in line with the assumption of academic integrity underpinning the NBCDTP evaluation process.

Good and Less Good Practice

As a rule of thumb, comments of c. 60-100 words are generally sufficient (though fewer may be required in the case of exceptionally strong or very weak candidates, and more in the case of candidates with a complex overall profile).

Examples of good and less good practice in terms of Subject Area review comments are given below. These have been anonymised, but are otherwise taken verbatim from Subject Area review comments returned in the Northern Bridge Doctoral Training Partnership Studentship Competition ran in 2015. Please note that in this year, the applications were graded out of 12/12/6 rather than 12/12/6/6.

Helpful:

Applicant 12: Outstanding achievement with 82 average in final year UG at University of xxx (79% overall) and current average of 77% in MA; second BA graduate in literary studies at University of xxx 2013 and currently top-performing in MA literary studies cohort at xxx University. Proposal 11: Outstanding: proposal identifies a new and potentially very valuable direction in 20thc xxx studies. The combination of formal literary and historico-political approaches is challenging and ambitious, but the outline shows a clear grasp of what’s at stake based on project’s strong foundations. Fit 6: Cross-School supervision for this project with experienced and research active supervisors, outstanding environment and training needs excellently addressed. 12/11/6

11/12/6/6

An outstanding candidate with a 2:1 (Hons) in XX as well as a truly unique skillset. The extensive and highly relevant work and research experience go well above and beyond what is required to make up for the lack of a Masters degree. In particular, the candidate has 26 years’ experience in XX Museum, supported by a solid reference, as well as high level commissions and academic research-related contributions, including a ‘Critically Endangered’ award. Overall the candidate demonstrates an excellent capacity and access to the resources to provide lasting impact from this research. The proposal is unique, specific, and based on outstanding practical experience. The candidate’s passion for this research area is made clear throughout the proposal as well as in the provided reference. The research questions are clear and an important part of XX’s heritage, being all the more important as this is currently critically endangered and may be lost if this work is not carried out. The supervisory team is a fantastic fit and includes a mix of career stages and experiences in supervision. The chosen university is a perfect fit to this project, as regionally this topic has a particular relevance and the research expertise resides inX university.

A strong candidate with some very high marks, but really let down by one exceptionally short reference (4 lines!). Archival research is not a methodology. An interesting idea for a proposal but not as well organised or conveyed as some others; there’s limited sense of the broader significance of the topic, and the comparative aspect could have been explained more. Supervisory statement is quite broad and the supervisors’ expertise has not been related particularly closely to the specific topics to be explored in the proposal. Limited analysis of training needs

though good to see that there is consideration of museum and curatorial skills. Good research environment statement. 10/9/4

The panel found the research question to be very challenging and was unconvinced that the methodology had sufficient focus to deliver within the timescale. The work of xxx and that of yyy are very distinctive and separate in ethos, approach and context and whilst it may be possible to juxtapose one to the other we found little evidence that the applicant was even aware of the contrast between these two, almost diametrically opposed, approaches. We also wanted more in methodology about how this work would go beyond practice to become research. We were less convinced about the match of supervisors to the project than other projects- the 2nd supervisor felt somewhat drafted in. 8/4/3

Unhelpful:

Note that in addition to their extreme brevity, the examples below contain at least one mismatch between the descriptor and the mark awarded.

A strong student, with a very strong but not outstanding proposal which seems overly narrowly focused. 10/8/5

A very strong candidate with a rather unexciting research proposal. 11/6/5

A very strong applicant. The research questions are limited and need a greater depth of theoretical underpinning. 9/6/6

Typical Applicant Profiles

These typical applicant profiles are for reference and orientation only. They are neither prescriptive nor exhaustive, but rather indicative of the kind of profiles that might typically attract specific applicant scores. They do not claim to cover all eventualities; the NBCDTP welcomes applicants with a broad range of qualifications and backgrounds, and the evaluation process relies on your academic judgement as Subject Area specialists.

Applicant Score 12

- High first class undergraduate degree (average significantly above 70);
- Excellent references.

And one of the following:

- a high distinction at MA level;
- a record of high-quality and relevant professional practice or work experience that has equipped the student with outstanding research skills, possibly evidenced by a record of scholarly publication.

Applicant Score 11

- High first class undergraduate degree (average significantly above 70);
- Excellent references.

And one of the following:

- a distinction at MA level;
- existing or predicted grades of an ongoing MA of over 70% and exceptionally strong references;
- a record of high-quality and relevant professional practice or work experience that has equipped the student with excellent research skills, possibly evidenced by a record of scholarly publication.

Applicant Score 9-10

- First class undergraduate degree, but with a jagged mark profile or an average close to the borderline;
- Positive references.

And one of the following:

- a distinction at MA level but with a jagged mark profile or an average close to the borderline;
- existing or predicted grades of an ongoing MA at or around distinction level, and strong references;

- a record of high-quality and relevant professional practice or work experience that has equipped the student with strong research skills.

In exceptional cases, a candidate with a very good upper-second-class undergraduate degree (with evidence of first-class potential) may attract an applicant score of 9 or 10 if they have achieved exceptional grades at MA level, or have a stellar record of professional achievement that demonstrates full preparedness for doctoral study in terms of knowledge-base and research skills.

Applicant Score 7-8

- Very good upper-second-class undergraduate degree, with evidence of first-class performance in some areas;
- Positive references, but possibly with minor reservations.

And one of the following:

- a distinction at MA level but with a jagged mark profile or an average close to the borderline;
- existing or predicted grades of an ongoing MA at or around distinction level, and strong references;
- a record of relevant professional practice or work experience that has equipped the student with excellent research skills.

OR:

- A first class undergraduate degree;
- Positive references, but possibly with minor reservations.

And one of the following:

- a merit at MA level;
- existing or predicted grades of an ongoing MA at merit level, and strong references;
- a record of relevant professional practice or work experience that has equipped the student with strong research skills.

Applicant Score 5-6

- Upper-second-class undergraduate degree, with evidence of first-class performance in some areas;
- Generally positive references, but with reservations regarding the candidate's preparedness for doctoral study. These reservations may be intellectual, temperamental, organisational, skills-based, etc.

And one of the following:

- a merit at MA level;
- existing or predicted grades of an ongoing MA at merit level;
- a record of relevant professional practice or experience that has equipped the student with some research skills.

OR:

- A first class undergraduate degree;
- Generally positive references, but with reservations regarding the candidate's preparedness for doctoral study. These reservations may be intellectual, temperamental, organisation, skills-based, etc.

And one of the following:

- a bare pass at MA level;
- existing or predicted grades of an ongoing MA at the level of a bare pass;
- a record of relevant professional practice or work experience that may have equipped the student with some research skills.

Applicant Score 3-4

- Low upper second undergraduate degree

And one of the following:

- Low merit or high pass at MA level
- a slight record of professional practice or work experience of tangential relevance and little by way of research-skills development.

Applicant Score 1-2

- A lower second undergraduate degree or below

And one of the following:

- No MA or a low pass at MA level
- No meaningful record of professional practice or work experience, and no demonstrable research skills.

Annex 7: NBCDTP Data Privacy Notice

Introduction

The Northern Bridge Consortium Doctoral Training Partnership (NBCDTP) awards AHRC funding to support Doctoral Training in the Arts and Humanities. This includes a stipend and payment of tuition fees, and additional funding to support activities associated with primary research, such as fieldwork and data collection; participation in specialist training events; and placements in non-HE organisations.

The NBCDTP facilitates the distribution of additional AHRC funding (for example, Innovation Placements), and can run competitions for funding on behalf of external agencies (for example, selecting candidates for AHRC Creative Economy Engagement Postdoctoral Fellowships).

In order to run a rigorous studentship competition and manage studentships across a partnership encompassing seven Universities, the NBCDTP processes personal data. Please read the privacy information below for details.

Please note: postgraduate application data will be processed separately by the institution you have applied to, in accordance with their terms and conditions.

PART 1 – GENERIC PRIVACY NOTICE

The NBCDTP and the universities of Durham, Newcastle, Northumbria, Queen’s Belfast, Sunderland, Teesside, and Ulster hold responsibilities under data protection legislation which include the duty to ensure that we provide individuals with information about how we process personal data. We do this in a number of ways, one of which is the publication of privacy notices. Our privacy notices comprise two parts – a generic part and a part tailored to the specific processing activity being undertaken.

Data Controller

The Data Controller for your data is the University to which you applied. If you would like more information about how your university uses your personal data, please visit your university’s Information Governance webpages, or contact the following:

University	Telephone	Email
Durham University Information Governance Unit	(0191 33) 46246 or 46103	info.access@durham.ac.uk
Newcastle University Records Management	(0191) 208 6000	rec-man@ncl.ac.uk
Northumbria University	0191 243 7357	dp.officer@northumbria.ac.uk
Queen’s University Belfast Information Compliance Unit	028 9097 2505	info.compliance@qub.ac.uk
Teesside University Data Protection Officer	01642 342093	dpo@tees.ac.uk
Ulster University Data Protection		gdpr@ulster.ac.uk
University of Sunderland Information Governance Unit	(0)191 515 2000	dataprotection@sunderland.ac.uk

Data Protection Officer

The Data Protection Officer is responsible for advising a university on compliance with Data Protection legislation and monitoring its performance against it. If you have any concerns regarding the way in which the university is processing your personal data, please contact the Data Protection Officer at the appropriate university:

University	Officer	Contact
Durham University	Jennifer Sewel University Secretary	(0191 33) 46144 jennifer.sewel@durham.ac.uk
Newcastle University	Information Security Officer (Compliance)	rec-man@ncl.ac.uk
Northumbria University	Duncan James Northumbria's Records and Information Manager	duncan.james@northumbria.ac.uk
Queen's University Belfast	Michelle Beegan / Derek Weir Information Compliance Officers	028 9097 2505 info.compliance@qub.ac.uk
Teesside University	University's Data Protection Officer	01642 342093 dpo@tees.ac.uk
Ulster University	Mr Eamon Mullan Data Protection Co-ordinator	028 7012 3502 e.mullan@ulster.ac.uk
University of Sunderland	Sam Seldon Data Protection Officer	dataprotection@sunderland.ac.uk

Retention

Each university keeps personal data for as long as it is needed for the purpose for which it was originally collected. Most of these time periods are set out in each university's records retention schedule.

Your Rights in Relation to Your Personal Data

Privacy Notices and/or Consent

You have the right to be provided with information about how and why we process your personal data. Where you have the choice to determine how your personal data will be used, we will ask you for consent. Where you do not have a choice (for example, where we have a legal obligation to process the personal data), we will provide you with a privacy notice. A privacy notice is a verbal or written statement that explains how we use personal data.

Whenever you give your consent for the processing of your personal data, you receive the right to withdraw that consent at any time. Where withdrawal of consent will have an impact on the services we are able to provide, this will be explained to you, so that you can determine whether it is the right decision for you.

Accessing Your Personal Data

You have the right to be told whether we are processing your personal data and, if so, to be given a copy of it. This is known as the Right of Subject Access. You can find out more about this right on each University's Subject Access Requests webpages:

- [Durham University](#)
- [Newcastle University](#)
- [Northumbria University](#)

- [Queen's University Belfast](#)
- [Teesside University](#)
- [Ulster University](#)
- [University of Sunderland](#)

Right to Rectification

If you believe that personal data we hold about you is inaccurate, please contact your university and the NBCDTP and we will investigate. You can also request that we complete any incomplete data.

Once we have determined what we are going to do, we will contact you to let you know.

Right to Erasure

You can ask us to erase your personal data in any of the following circumstances:

- We no longer need the personal data for the purpose it was originally collected;
- You withdraw your consent and there is no other legal basis for the processing;
- You object to the processing and there are no overriding legitimate grounds for the processing;
- The personal data have been unlawfully processed;
- The personal data have to be erased for compliance with a legal obligation;
- The personal data have been collected in relation to the offer of information society services (information society services are online services such as banking or social media sites).

Once we have determined whether we will erase the personal data, we will contact you to let you know.

Right to Restriction of Processing

You can ask us to restrict the processing of your personal data in the following circumstances:

- You believe that the data is inaccurate and you want us to restrict processing until we determine whether it is indeed inaccurate;
- The processing is unlawful and you want us to restrict processing rather than erase it;
- We no longer need the data for the purpose we originally collected it but you need it in order to establish, exercise or defend a legal claim;
- You have objected to the processing and you want us to restrict processing until we determine whether our legitimate interests in processing the data override your objection.

Once we have determined how we propose to restrict processing of the data, we will contact you to discuss and, where possible, agree this with you.

Making a Complaint

If you are unsatisfied with the way in which we process your personal data, we ask that you let us know so that we can try and put things right. If we are not able to resolve issues to your satisfaction, you can refer the matter to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). The ICO can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF
Telephone: 0303 123 1113

Website: [Information Commissioner's Office](#)

PART 2 – PRIVACY NOTICE FOR THE NBCDTP

This section of the Privacy Notice provides you with the privacy information that you need to know before you provide personal data to your University which, by virtue of your application for a NBCDTP studentship award, will be processed by the NBCDTP for the particular purposes stated below.

Type(s) of Personal Data Collected and Held by the NBCDTP and Method of Collection

We hold your name, address and contact details as you have provided in your NBCDTP Studentship Nomination form. The NBCDTP will also have a record of your University ID. Application details processed by the NBCDTP may further include personal data provided to your university in relation to your age, disability, gender identity, marital status, race, religion, sex or sexual orientation depending on the requirements of the institution. For the purposes of transparency, it should be noted that personal data are not used to inform any decisions around funding, but rather are provided in an anonymised form to the AHRC, and thereby to UKRI, to ensure the funding councils can work towards their Equality and Diversity targets.

Legal Basis

The NBCDTP processes your data prior to, during, and for a period after a programme of study under the basis of your consent, which you will provide to your proposed supervisor and university.

We are required to demonstrate our support for students with disabilities, and for this we need to request and hold Special Category data and medical evidence, which we process under our legal obligations to the Equality Act 2010.

Anonymised data on select categories of protected characteristics will be provided to UK Research and Innovation via the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) to inform progress against their widening participation and Equality and Diversity policies, in line with their funding requirements.

The NBCDTP processes data in respect of statutory obligations, which is part of its public task.

We may also use your personal information where we need to protect your (or someone else's) interests or where it is in the public interest. When we process your personal information we will do so provided your fundamental rights do not override those interests.

How Personal Data is Stored by the NBCDTP

Personal data will be held by the NBCDTP for the duration of the annual studentship competition on secure servers within the seven participating universities, with access limited to NBCDTP administrators and approved academics. Application data will be shared via secure password-protected links with members of academic staff within our seven partner institutions, and with a limited pool of external reviewers, for the purposes of awarding AHRC monies.

After the conclusion of the studentship competition, application data will be held by the host university in accordance with local policy and practice, but may be shared with NBCDTP administrative staff and academics where appropriate to manage the studentship and support applications for additional monies (for example, overseas fieldwork, difficult language training, Disabled Students Allowance).

Student data is also held locally by academic departments, colleges and professional support services in email, network storage and paper files.

Details of the successful candidates' projects will be shared with the AHRC, who will then post the project details along with the name of the candidate on the Gateway to Research (as per the terms and conditions of accepting the offer of a studentship).

How Personal Data is Processed by the NBCDTP

- Provided to academic reviewing panels to make informed and appropriate academic decisions on funding and allocation of NBCDTP and AHRC grant monies;
- Administering study, such as recording of achievements, determination of award and monitoring of attendance;
- Administering finance, such as payment of fees;
- Monitoring equal opportunities;
- Processing student academic appeals and student discipline cases;
- Direct mailing of or about (i) student benefits and opportunities offered by or through the NBCDTP and (ii) NBCDTP or partner university activities and events organised for students.

Who the NBCDTP Shares Personal Data With

The NBCDTP will disclose personal data to the AHRC and UK Research and Innovation in accordance with the grant terms and conditions and meeting reporting requirements.

The NBCDTP will disclose personal data to the NBCDTP Moderation Sub-committee and Studentships Committee, comprising of a limited pool of internal and external reviewers, for the purposes of allocating AHRC studentships.

The NBCDTP may share details relating to student illness or special cases with the AHRC and NBCDTP Academic Directors where the nature of the issue may impact upon NBCDTP funding.

How Long Personal Data is Held by the NBCDTP

Administering study, (successful applications, academic progress, transfers and withdrawals)	7 years after the end of the AHRC NBCDTP grant
Handling of enquiries from prospective students	1 year after current year
Conduct and results of disciplinary proceedings and academic appeals	In line with the host institution's policy
Processing of tuition fees and scholarship funds	7 years after the end of the AHRC NBCDTP grant
Administration of research grants provided by research councils or corporate sponsors	7 years after the end of the AHRC NBCDTP grant

How to Object to the NBCDTP Processing Your Personal Data:

Any concerns, queries or complaints relating to the potential misuse of data by the NBCDTP should be sent to the NBCDTP Administrators in the first instance; this should not include concerns around institutional use of data, which should be addressed to the relevant point of contact within the individual institution.

NBCDTP Administrators
 Newcastle University
 northernbridge.admin@newcastle.ac.uk

Visitors to Our Website/Webpages:

When someone visits **www.northernbridge.ac.uk** we use a third party service, Google Analytics, to collect standard internet log information and details of visitor behaviour patterns. We do this to find out things such as the number of visitors to the various parts of the site. This information is only processed in a way which does not identify anyone. We do not make, and do not allow Google to make, any attempt to find out the identities of those visiting our website. If we do want to collect personally identifiable information through our website, we will be transparent about this. We will make it clear when we collect personal information and will explain what we intend to do with it.

Use of Cookies by the NBCDTP

A cookie is a simple text file that is stored on your computer or mobile device by a website's server and only that server will be able to retrieve or read the contents of that cookie. Cookies allow websites to remember user preferences, choices and selections, such as what's in your shopping basket. The NBCDTP does not use cookies to collect personal information about you.

Links to Other Websites

This privacy notice does not cover the links within this site linking to other websites. We encourage you to read the privacy statements on the other websites you visit.

Changes to this Privacy Notice:

We regularly review our privacy information to ensure that it remains accurate and current. We will review and update this privacy information whenever we plan to use personal data for any new purpose. Any changes to this privacy information will be communicated to you.

Further information:

If you have any questions which you feel have not been covered by this Privacy Notice, please email us or write to:

NBCDTP Administrators
Newcastle University
northernbridge.admin@newcastle.ac.uk

Annex 8: NBCDTP Subject Areas

The NBCDTP offers doctoral studentships only in the subject areas listed below. Not all subject areas are offered by each institution:

Archaeology

Archaeological Theory
Archaeology of Human Origins
Archaeology of Literate Societies
Industrial Archaeology
Landscape and Environmental Archaeology
Maritime Archaeology
Prehistoric Archaeology

Classics

Classical Literature
Classical Reception
Epigraphy and Papyrology
Languages and Linguistics
Philosophy, Thought and Religion

Cultural and Museum Studies

Conservation of Art and Textiles
Cultural Geography
Cultural Studies and Pop Culture
Gender and Sexuality Studies
Heritage Management
Museum and Gallery Studies
Policy, Arts Management and Creative Industries

Development Studies

Area and Development Studies

History

American Studies
Cultural History
Economic and Social History
History of Science/Medicine/Technology
Imperial/Colonial History
Political History
Post-Colonial Studies
Religious History
War Studies

Information and Communication Technologies

Information and Knowledge Management

Law and Legal Studies

Common Law, including Commercial Law
Comparative Law
Criminal Law and Criminology
EU Law
Human Rights
International Law
Jurisprudence/Philosophy of Law
Law Regulated by Statute
Law Relating to Property

Legal History
Public Law

Library and Information Studies

Archives
Computational Studies
Information and Knowledge Management
Information Science and Retrieval
Library Studies
Records Management

Philosophy

Aesthetics
Epistemology
Ethics
History of Ideas
History of Philosophy
Language and Philosophical Logic
Metaphysics
Philosophy of Mind
Philosophy of Religion
Philosophy of Science and Mathematics and
Mathematical Logic
Political Philosophy

Political Science and International Studies

Diplomacy and International Relations

Theology, Divinity and Religion

Alternative Spiritualities/New Religious Movements
Atheism/Secularism
Buddhism
Church History and History of Theology
Contemporary Religion
East Asian Religions
Hinduism
Inter-faith Religions
Islam
Jainism
Judaism
Liturgy
Modern Theology
New Testament
Old Testament
Sikhism
Systematic Theology

Design

Architecture History, Theory and Practice
Design History, Theory and Practice
Digital Art and Design
Product Design

Drama and Theatre Studies

Drama and Theatre - Other
 Dramaturgy
 Performance and Live Art
 Scenography
 Theatre and History
 Theatre and Society
 Theories of Theatre

Media

Film History, Theory and Criticism
 Journalism
 Media and Communication Studies
 New Media/Web-Based Studies
 Publishing
 Television History, Theory and Criticism

Music

Classical Music
 Composition
 History of Music
 Music and Society
 Musical Performance
 Musicology
 Popular Music
 Traditional Music

Visual Arts

Applied Arts History, Theory and Practice
 Art History
 Art Theory and Aesthetics
 Community Art including Art and Health
 Design History, Theory and Practice
 Digital Arts History, Theory and Practice
 Film-based Media History, Theory and Practice
 Fine Art History, Theory and Practice
 Installation and Sound Art History, Theory and Practice

Photography History, Theory and Practice
 Time-based Media History, Theory and Practice

Languages and Literature

American Studies
 Asiatic and Oriental Studies
 Celtic Studies
 Comparative Literature
 Comparative Studies
 Creative Writing
 English Language and Literature
 Ethnography and Anthropology
 French Studies
 Gender Studies
 German Studies (including Dutch and Yiddish)
 Hispanic, Portuguese and Latin Studies
 History and Development of the English Language
 Interpreting and Translation
 Italian Studies
 Lifewriting
 Literary and Cultural Theory
 Medieval Literature
 Middle Eastern and African Studies
 Post-Colonial Studies
 Russian, Slavonic and East European Languages and Culture

Linguistics

Applied Linguistics
 Language Variation and Change
 Lexicon
 Linguistic Theory
 Linguistics (General)
 Morphology and Phonology
 Phonetics
 Semantics and Pragmatics
 Syntax
 Textual Editing and Bibliography

Version Control	
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