

Good practice for setting up Studentship opportunities

Introduction

The ESRC is not being prescriptive about the type of collaborative project that DTCs establish, but is rather asking they ensure that in all cases the studentships and other opportunities are developed in collaboration with the partner organisation and involve substantial user engagement. This can involve any form of collaboration including ESRC models of collaboration and co-funding such as CASE studentships and Government Collaborative studentships.

Over the years the ESRC has developed good practice guidance in establishing these forms of collaborative studentship. The following information is intended to offer some useful advice to organisations looking to establish this type of collaborative project.

Identifying the partner

Collaborating partners can be private sector companies, public sector bodies or voluntary organisations. All collaborating partners should normally have an operating base within the UK in order to ensure that the student can be practically supported and supervised as well as being based within the organisation for part of the studentship.

Although collaborating partners should normally have an operating base in the UK, it is at the DTC's discretion to set up overseas collaborations where there are appropriate measures in place for the organisation to support and supervise the student over the course of the studentship.

In identifying an appropriate partnership and reaching agreement on the arrangements for the research project DTCs and collaborating partners should consider:

- the description of the research project(s)
- the arrangements for joint supervision
- the arrangements for seeking ethical approval and for agreements on intellectual property arising from the research
- the means of identifying an appropriate student. (Please note: prospective students must have, or expect to have, at least a 2:1 from their first degree, and conform to ESRC's rules around eligibility for funding).

The research questions being asked

This should be well thought out in terms of the research questions asked and the approach and techniques to be used. It should be achievable within the proposed timescale (i.e. three years funding plus one year for submission of the thesis).

How the project will be approached, with particular reference to the methodologies/techniques which might be employed:

The methodologies/techniques and planned timescale should be appropriate to the project so that the outcomes will have wider relevance than purely addressing the needs of the non-academic partner.

The anticipated outcomes from the project, in terms of its contribution to knowledge and understanding, new methodologies and techniques, data etc:

The project should contribute to the successful creation, development and application of new techniques or ways of working or of relating to the broader environment in a way that improves the effectiveness and efficiency of individuals and organisations. It should contribute to the ESRC's mission to provide trained social scientists that meet the needs of users and beneficiaries, thereby contributing to the economic competitiveness of the United Kingdom, the effectiveness of public services and policy, and the quality of life. It should also fulfil the aim of a collaborative studentship in providing a real opportunity for a student to gain firsthand experience of work outside the academic environment.

The benefits and outcomes of the research should not be confined solely to the collaborating partner and therefore the envisaged intellectual as well as commercial benefits should be emphasised.

Plans for dissemination of outcomes:

The completed research should be published as widely as possible, to both academic and non-academic audiences.

Ethical considerations:

The important question of ethical approval, in relation to the proposed research project, must be fully addressed. You should demonstrate that considerations of the following have been made: honesty to research staff and subjects about the purpose; methods and possible uses of the research (or risks involved); confidentiality of information supplied by research subjects and anonymity of respondents and independence and impartiality of researchers to the subject of the research. If you intend to refer to a professional code of ethics governing research in your area, this should be specified.

Supervision and management of the project

Collaborative students can place higher demands on the time of supervisors than standard research studentships. Consideration should be given to the current supervisory workload for each proposed supervisor and where three or more research students are being supervised ensure that an appropriate level of supervision will be available to the proposed collaborative studentship.

Please consider how the collaborating partner will be involved in the management and supervision of the research project. In particular there should be formal arrangements for the confirmation of supervision and management of the project in the light of changes in key personnel for the project. The extent of this involvement should be discussed and agreed between the collaborating partners in the first instance and then with the chosen student once recruited. The non-academic partner will be expected to provide an induction programme for the student similar to that provided for new employees and, during the tenure of the award, the student will also be required to spend time on the organisation's premises. (For a full time three-year award, the minimum is three months per year- not necessarily continuous). During this period the student must be engaged in activities which comprise an integral component of the research to be presented in the thesis.

The advise that the following should be provided: special materials and facilities which will be made available to the student (provided by the non-academic partner free of charge); a description of the work to be undertaken at their premises; including proposed time-table showing the duration and frequency of visits; and an indication of the part of the organisation to which the studentship will be attached.

There should be real measurable benefits for the non-academic partner from the outcomes of the project. Expectations of how these will benefit the organisation should be considered and agreed between the HEI and the collaborating partner.

Collaborative students are expected to be jointly supervised by a member(s) of staff from the academic institution and an employee of the non-academic organisation. The supervisors will be expected to agree the arrangements for the delivery of formal research training, regular formal progress meetings and briefing meetings with the student, throughout the period of research.

Financial contributions

Although it is at the DTC's discretion whether to require co-funding from the collaborating partner, traditionally the ESRC has set standard levels of contribution for the two collaborative studentship competition models:

- CASE Studentships: £4000 per annum (£2000 to the institution and £2000 to the student).
- Government Collaborative Studentships: 50 per cent of the studentship costs from the host organisation

The ESRC would therefore strongly encourage that wherever possible non-academic partners consider a contribution to the collaborative studentship. However, where the nature of the non-academic partner might mean the approval of a financial contribution might be difficult to obtain other arrangements might be considered such as contribution in kind. In kind contributions would be expected to be resources such as office space at the non-academic partner's offices, provision of specialist training courses, access to data and resources, for example. All discussions of co-funding should be discussed between the DTC and collaborating organisation.

Intellectual Property Rights (IPR)

An official agreement between the academic and non-academic partner(s) concerning the distribution of proceeds from commercially valuable research is considered an essential element of any collaborative studentship. It is expected that an agreement covering Intellectual Property Rights will need to be submitted at the time of nominating the student. It is important to note that the responsibility for safeguarding the student's rights is deemed to rest with the DTC.

The benefits of Knowledge Exchange

The ESRC place great emphasis on the importance of knowledge exchange in making an impact on policy and practice, and would like to encourage DTCs to set up and organise knowledge exchange activities for ESRC funded students.

Knowledge exchange can involve a range of methods but is ultimately about sharing and applying good ideas, research results, experiences and skills. This can be achieved through such activities as short term internship or placement opportunities, where the student is based within a non-academic organisation within the public, third (voluntary) or private sector where they can work as part of a team involved with policy/practice development.

Knowledge exchange activities can provide students with a clear set of benefits such as; networking within the policy arena, being given the opportunity to enhance a range of transferrable skills such as time management, report writing and communication skills, over all contributes to the skills and professional development of these students.

Host organisations equally benefit from having an additional resource, the generation of real outputs, adding to the evidence base within the organisation and producing briefing papers and reports which can in turn impact on policy development.

The ESRC Knowledge Exchange team currently run a range of knowledge exchange activities and offer further information on collaboration through the ESRC website:

<http://www.esrc.ac.uk/collaboration>