

## SeNSS: ADVICE REGARDING THE CHOICE OF STUDENTSHIP ROUTE

**This advice is for students, supervisors, and Pathway selection panels.**

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

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

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

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

Difficult cases can arise when the student has done (or is doing) a Masters at a University outside SeNSS, including overseas. ***In these cases, the key thing is to ask the SeNSS core team as early as possible for advice about the appropriate route for a particular student.*** To make a determination, the core team will need information about that Masters. It is not sufficient to tell us that it includes a module on qualitative or quantitative methods, for example, as many modules with these titles do not meet ESRC requirements. What we need is a summary of all of the modules on the Masters that have any significant research training element within them. This summary may be provided via a weblink to the module description / outline, or a PDF of the module description / outline, and should contain details of all sessions and topics and their assessment.

In many cases, the student's Masters may partially satisfy the ESRC training requirements, and it may no longer be necessary to require them to take a whole Masters (the 1+3 year route). ***We now have the option to award +3.5 or +3.25 awards, in which the extra 6 or 3 months of funding is designed to allow the student to take modules that bring their past training up to the level and spread required by the ESRC.*** To help improve this process in the competition for 2020 entry, we are requiring that students upload such Masters' module outlines or weblinks as part of their application. This is necessary whenever the student has done (or is doing) a Masters that is not on the SeNSS approved list.

In their SeNSS application, the student is asked to indicate what route they are applying for. This choice (on the form) is simply indicative, as we find that many students do not make the right selection given their past research methods training at Masters level. Applicants and their supervisors should not get too concerned about which route has been indicated on the form, as this might not be the award that is eventually received.

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

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

All awards made will be compliance-checked by the SeNSS core team, which will identify any supplementary training modules required. These modules will be included in the students' award letter and, ordinarily, the student will be required to take and pass the module assessments. Students (or their supervisors or home institutions) facing this issue must therefore **contact the SeNSS core team as early as possible** to confirm that they require additional training and to identify how it will be delivered. Please email Abi Shirley, the SeNSS Training Manager ([trainingmanager@senss-dtp.ac.uk](mailto:trainingmanager@senss-dtp.ac.uk)) in the first instance.