

MATHEMATICAL, PHYSICAL AND LIFE SCIENCES DIVISION

Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences Divisional Office
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EPSRC Doctoral Prize Scheme – Call for nominations for 2024 competition.

- The **EPSRC Doctoral Prize scheme** will run again in 2024. This circular calls for nominations and provides details of the scheme.
- **Action:** Departments are asked to notify the supervisors of eligible candidates, to invite them to nominate suitable candidates from within Oxford or another UK higher education institution, and to advertise this opportunity to students within the department. **Please note applications should be made by the student with support from the proposed supervisor. For external candidates the supervisor will need to complete the online form on their behalf as the form requires SSO access.**
- Supervisors should complete the [online application form](#) by **10am on Monday 13 May 2024**. Please note any internal department deadlines for project approval before submitting your application.
- Please direct any queries to Stacey Doyle, Graduate Funding Assistant (graduate.studies@mpls.ox.ac.uk)

A. Background

Institutions can use up to 10% of their EPSRC Doctoral Training Partnership (DTP) allocation to support the EPSRC Doctoral Prize scheme.

The EPSRC Doctoral Prize scheme is intended to help universities retain and recruit the best PhD students receiving EPSRC support to increase the impact of their PhD, and to improve retention of the very best students in research careers. In 2024 a total of £307,000 will be made available to support the scheme, with the competition for awards being administered by the Division.

All awards made in 2024 are to be allocated in a single funding round and nominations for awards are now requested.



B. Purpose and use of funding

Please note that EPSRC best practice guidance states that “Universities should advertise the scheme externally and encourage applicants to move organisations and into new research areas”. Previously, at Oxford, the Doctoral Prize scheme has recruited solely internal DPhil candidates. To ensure better compliance with EPSRC rules for this scheme, and to facilitate broader collaboration and diversity of experience, supervisors should consider candidates within their network who are undertaking a PhD at other higher education institutions.

Awards can comprise between three months and twenty-four months salary (07S.2 of the University salary scale) and research support costs for an EPSRC-funded student following the submission of their DPhil thesis.

Typically, awards are made for six months. Applications for awards longer than six months should include a comprehensive case to support the need for a longer award.

Applications will need to make a case for the following (selection criteria):

- that the award will lead to **increased impact** of the student’s DPhil research in terms of publications, Knowledge Transfer (KT) and, particularly, outreach;
- that the award will not merely be used as an opportunity to continue or complete DPhil work, but will enable a **step-change enhancement** to the applicant’s scientific career (EPSRC has noted that it would like the scheme to “**encourage adventure**” and see awardees move into new research areas);
- that the student is academically of the **highest calibre** (within the top ~10-15% of EPSRC funded students) and well-placed to pursue a career in research;
- that the award will provide **benefits for the awardee**, including how the department and supervisor will support them during this period – in line with current EPSRC guidance, provision should be made for the awardee to have, in addition to a supervisor, a ‘mentor’ who is not the awardee’s line manager or supervisor;
- that the proposed project has both a **well-defined** and **reasonable budget and timeline**, with detailed justification offered for any project over six months in duration.

Nominated candidates:

- must be EPSRC funded students (that is, they must have received fees and/or stipend from an EPSRC training grant, such as EPSRC DTP, I-CASE, DTP-CASE, CDT or have been funded on an EPSRC research grant);
- should meet the EPSRC’s expectation that they are ‘academically in the top 10-15% of their cohort’;
- must have either already submitted their DPhil thesis or be reasonably expected to do so in advance of the proposed start date of funding (consideration might also be given to starting the award after the candidate has completed their viva).

Providing this condition is met, the proposed start date of funding can be at any time from 1 October 2024 onwards, subject to the proviso that funding overall cannot extend beyond 30 September 2028 – no payments under the scheme can be made after this date. Some latitude should be allowed between the expected DPhil submission date and the proposed start date of the Doctoral Prize funding, as the award will not be payable until the candidate's DPhil thesis is submitted. The start date of funding should be no later than 1 April 2026.

Departments:

- should ensure that the nominee's project is a viable one, will further the aim of increasing the impact of the student's doctoral research in terms of publications, KT and outreach, and will be helpful in retaining the student in a research career (EPSRC will ask the University to report at the end of the award period on the use of the awards and the outputs obtained, in terms of these objectives);
- should ensure that appropriate support/space etc. is available;
- and that an induction procedure will be followed at the time the awardee commences employment.

Use of funding:

- Funding may be requested to cover three to twenty-four month's salary, research support costs and other specific costs, with most awards expected to be of six months duration.
- Salary shall be at Grade 07S.2 with employer costs of pension and National Insurance allowed for.
- The panel reserves the right to make awards at a lower level and/or for a shorter time period than that applied for.

C. Applications

Applications should be submitted [via the online form](#) with the following supporting information uploaded:

- a budget setting out -
 - salary, including employer costs of pension and National Insurance
 - research support costs
 - funding to visit other groups and to facilitate KT;
- a case for support of maximum two sides of A4 (minimum font size 10);
- a copy of the candidate's academic CV; and
- a reference from the candidate's supervisor.



Further information on the requirements for the supporting information is provided in the online form.

Please send nominations [via the online form](#) by **10am on Monday 13 May 2024**. **Please note any internal department deadlines for project approval before submitting your application. All the supporting documents must be uploaded as part of the online application.**

Successful applications will be selected by a small panel that has been set up for the Doctoral Prize scheme.

D. Terms of employment

Please note that Doctoral prize award holders will be employees of the University, not students, and therefore the department will need to issue a contract to the candidate once the offer of an award is confirmed.

Overseas students are eligible to apply providing they are EPSRC funded. This now includes students from the EU, who may or may not have settled or pre-settled status in the UK. In some cases visa arrangements may need to be considered as employment will be subject at all times to meeting the Home Office requirements and the provision of original documentation to establish the right to work and remain in the UK in advance of the start date.

If you have any queries concerning the application process or any other aspect of the EPSRC Doctoral Prize scheme, then please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Stacey Doyle

Graduate Funding Assistant, MPLS