

Leverhulme Doctoral Scholarships 2023 Frequently Asked Questions

Eligibility

Can an application involve more than two universities?

Collaborative bids are limited to a maximum of two universities, however, other universities may be involved in a doctoral programme as unpaid partners, through such activities as providing access to facilities, training and/or expertise.

Can Independent Research Organisations apply to the call as co-applicants and are letters of support required?

The scheme is open only to UK universities, defined as organisations which have research degree awarding powers in the UK. Independent Research Organisations can be involved in Doctoral Scholarship programmes as unpaid partners, through activities such as providing opportunities for internships, training or access to facilities and expertise. It is not necessary to provide letters of support from such organisations and indeed the online grants system does not have the capacity for this. The involvement of any additional organisations should be described in the application.

Can members of the supervisory team be from other universities, overseas institutions or independent research organisations?

In a single university bid it is possible to include a second supervisor from another university, but overseas supervisors are not permitted, although they can be involved in the programme in other capacities such as having involvement in training, summer schools etc. Independent Research Organisations can co-supervise PhDs, as long as the principal supervisor is based at a UK university. Details of the supervisory arrangements should be detailed in the application form.

Can a university be a partner on multiple applications in the same subject area if the doctoral programmes would be on different topics?

While universities can be a partner on more than one Doctoral Scholarships application, these should be in different disciplinary areas, regardless of the topic.

Topics

Is a general topic such as sustainability allowed?

Yes, but there does need to be a level of detail beneath the general topic to demonstrate how it would be able to sustain up to eighteen scholarships of up to four years' duration.

For the 2023 call, does the Trust have a preference for applications in science and technology or arts/social sciences?

The scheme is open to all disciplines and as a responsive mode funder, the Trust does not have a preference for proposals from particular disciplines. Given the focus on interdisciplinarity, the Trust welcomes applications which involve a mixture of science and arts/social science.

Is the Trust looking for topic areas not covered by other funders?

If another funder has a large programme in a particular area it would make the case for a Doctoral Scholarship less compelling, although the Trust doesn't have a list of topics it will not accept to the call.

Is an interdisciplinary topic preferred, or are single-discipline topics equally likely to succeed?

The Trust and the scheme have a focus on funding interdisciplinary research and would therefore expect topics to involve more than one discipline.

Can the subject areas for the doctoral programme be related to existing programmes?

The subject areas can be related to existing doctoral programmes, but applicants would need to demonstrate strongly how the new programme would differ from the existing one and to show a clear break between the two.

The Trust mentions that it doesn't support 'Policy-driven research where the principal objective is to assemble an evidence base for immediate policy initiatives.' Could you comment on how tightly that line is drawn? Research relevant to policy is presumably not disadvantaged?

There is no hard and fast rule, but in general, the balance of effort needs to be on academic research elements rather than on outputs designed to influence policy. While research outputs may, of course, go on to inform such things, they cannot be the principal aim of the work. If applicants are uncertain of the eligibility of the proposed topic of their doctoral programme, they should contact the Trust for advice.

Collaboration and Doctoral Programme Management

Is it possible to have more than one PI on a single institution Doctoral Scholarships application?

For the purposes of the application, one Principal Investigator should be identified. However, it is possible for the doctoral scholarship programme to have a co-director and/or a wider management team. Details of how the programme would be managed should be provided in the application.

Is status of the PI important? For example, is a Professor leading an application deemed more 'serious' than an Associate Professor or is it 'the best person to lead', irrespective of status?

The proposed doctoral programme should be led by the best person to do so, regardless of academic status. A proposal which is led by an individual who is not of professorial status would not be less competitive than one that is. However, the Trust would want reassurance in the institutional statement that the individual would be fully supported in their role.

Can we collaborate across departments within the same university to showcase interdisciplinarity but under one PI?

Yes, the usual model of a Leverhulme Trust Doctoral Scholarships programme is one which involves collaboration across a number of departments to support an interdisciplinary doctoral programme.

If a decision is made not to involve a second university, is it necessary to account for that decision in the application? Do Leverhulme prefer two universities?

The Trust does not have a preference for collaborative proposals and there is no need to justify a single institution bid.

If your proposal is based on very fundamental science, is it OK that the majority of researchers involved are in one department, in order to truly tackle that problem?

If the majority of the proposed supervisors will be from one department, the applicant will need to demonstrate how an interdisciplinary programme will be delivered.

The PhD Programme

Does the PhD programme need to have a four-year duration? What if your university normally has 3-year PhD terms?

The scheme offers funding for 4-year PhD studentships, but programmes may be for a shorter duration according to what is standard within the discipline and/or institution.

As a 4-year funded period, does the Trust expect a taught component to the degree programme?

The Trust does not expect a taught component to the PhD programme, although it appreciates that there are variations across both disciplines and institutions. Many students undertake particular taught modules in the first year of the doctoral programme to obtain the necessary skills for their PhD and this can be covered by the research and training funds.

Does the Trust expect that each bid will have an Master's Plus PhD component? Would this strengthen the bid?

The Master's plus PhD programme is specifically for the ring-fenced studentships for individuals from underrepresented groups. The Trust does not expect a Master's component to the standard PhD programme, although this is possible given that funding is provided for up to four years.

Are Leverhulme only looking for a training programme that trains PhDs for an academic career or are they looking for something more holistic that will enable researchers to gain jobs in non-academic settings?

The Trust are looking for programmes which will prepare students to move into roles both within and beyond academia. To date, Trust-funded scholars have taken up posts within academia but also in other sectors including industry, government and the third sector.

Does the Trust expect to see a list of potential PhD projects?

The Trust does not need to see a full list of potential PhD projects but it is useful to see examples of the types of projects expected within the proposed doctoral programme.

Is the programme open only to home students or also international students?

On the standard 4-year PhD programme, three of the fifteen places can be allocated to international students with the higher fees covered by the Trust, up to a maximum of £25,000 per year. It is possible to recruit a higher number of international students but the university would need to either cover or waive the difference between the UK and international fees. The Trust expects that students will be able to focus fully on their studies so does not support self-funding of the difference between what the Trust offers and full fees.

Does the Leverhulme Trust prefer students to be full time or part time or is it not an issue?

The Trust expects that scholarships will be advertised as full-time but will consider part-time studentships where this is justified. However, please note that studentships need to be a minimum of 0.5 FTE.

Are PhD candidates permitted to teach to gain experience?

Yes, PhD scholars may undertake teaching duties, but this should not be a large commitment which would risk distracting them from their doctoral studies. The Trust's emphasis is on the research.

Would internships be supported as part of the PhD student experience?

Yes, it is possible to include internships as part of the doctoral programme, although institutions will need to be mindful of the duration of these and the potential impact on the students' PhD studies.

What sort of outcome of the scholarship scheme is expected by the Trust?

The Trust does not have formal outcome measures beyond scholars completing their doctoral studies and the legacy that the programme has upon the area of research within the university.

Master's Plus PhD Scholarships/EDI Issues

Would it be possible for all of the 18 students to come from low income and minority backgrounds beyond the three ring-fenced places?

The Trust encourages diverse cohorts beyond the three ring-fenced Master's plus PhD places.

In terms of the EDI component, is Leverhulme doing any overall monitoring?

Yes, the Trust is collecting EDI data on students recruited to the Doctoral Scholarship programmes to enable it to assess and monitor the levels of participation in its schemes by under-represented groups.

In relation to the Master's Plus PhDs, is there any guidance as to what qualifies as a research Master's degree?

Applicants will need to specify which Master's degrees will be included in the proposed Doctoral Scholarship programme as part of the Master's plus PhD route. The Trust expects that any Master's level degree included in the offer would contain a substantial amount of research (at least 60/180 credits) and applicants should demonstrate that the degree routinely enables students to progress to a PhD.

Universities will have responsibility for assessing student eligibility for the Master's plus PhD route and will need to determine whether a student who already has a particular master's degree would normally be admitted straight to PhD or whether they are suitable for the Master's plus PhD route.

The Application Form

Has the online form changed from the last round?

Yes, the online form has been updated to include a section to enable applicants to describe how the doctoral scholars would be supervised, and the plans for training and cohort-building activities. The form has also been revised to account for the possibility of collaborative proposals.

In the detailed statement - how much detail is required/expected regarding each of the scholarships? Or would you expect more of a general outline of the topics, and methods used etc?

A more general outline of the scholarships is expected in the application given that projects are usually developed prior to advertisement and/or in consultation with students, however, sufficient detail needs to be provided to enable the panel assessing the proposal to see what the programme is trying to do and how the projects

Funding

Does the Trust provide funding for administrative support of the doctoral programme?

The scheme does not provide funding for the administrative support of the doctoral programme, typically this is something the university would contribute to the programme.

University Support

Are additional studentships funded by other sources seen as an advantage by the Trust and would this be positive for assessment?

While there is no requirement for institutions to contribute additional studentships to the Doctoral Scholarship programme, and this is not part of the assessment criteria, additional studentships are welcome and should be detailed in the application form. However, please note that the Trust seeks to fully fund the students on its Doctoral Scholarship programmes, it does not support part-funding of its students.

Evaluation of Proposals

Are you able to say who will be on the panel to evaluate the applications? Will they be academics? Business people? A mixture?

The panel to assess the applications will be put together following the call deadline to ensure appropriate disciplinary expertise in relation to the proposals submitted. The panel will comprise academic experts who will make recommendations to the Trust Board. The Trust Board make the final funding decisions and are primarily composed of senior business executives.

Is the track record and capacity of the host university a strong requirement or the Trust is happy to fund innovative ideas regardless?

Track record is important but it is not necessary for the university to have already held a UKRI Doctoral Training Centre or Partnership. However, institutions do need to demonstrate that they have the capacity to deliver the proposed doctoral programme in terms of supervisory expertise.

Other

What's the success rate for the Doctoral Scholarships scheme?

Over the past three calls, the scheme has had an average success rate of 15%.

Are there any obvious pitfalls the Trust has seen made in previous applications?

Panel members and Trustees look for the coherence of the proposed topic and whether the project comes across as bold, innovative and exciting. The interdisciplinarity of the proposed programme also needs to be convincing, as does the institution's capacity to deliver the programme. Institutional support is also important in terms of the university demonstrating its commitment to the programme and demonstrating that it would be of major strategic importance to the university. The 2023 call will also have a greater focus on supervision, student training and cohort-building activities. As collaborative doctoral programmes are now permitted for the first time, applicants on such proposals will need to set out and explain how the partnership will be managed.

Does the Trust accept 'pre-submission enquiries' to check if the thinking behind a bid is in line with what you expect?

The Trust can advise on the eligibility of a topic for a proposal but not whether an area would be of interest or deemed fundable