

Quick guide

Postgraduate doctoral courses

Overview

In AY 2018/19 postgraduate doctoral funding was introduced for English and Welsh domiciled students undertaking an eligible course within England or Wales. A student must be undertaking a full doctoral degree course (i.e. a full programme of doctoral study) to be eligible for a Postgraduate Doctoral Loan. Partial courses, where students utilise prior attainment to bypass aspects of the doctoral course, are not eligible for support.

Course eligibility

As mentioned above, a student must be undertaking a full doctoral degree course (i.e. a full programme of doctoral study) to be eligible for a Postgraduate Doctoral Loan. Partial courses, where students utilise prior attainment to bypass aspects of the doctoral course, are not eligible for support.

A student must register for a full doctoral degree course in order to be eligible for postgraduate doctoral funding. A student who registers for a standalone master's course is not eligible. They should apply for postgraduate master's funding instead.

Where a student is initially enrolled on a master's course, but this represents an integral part of their attainment of a doctoral qualification, this should be captured as a single course. The student will be eligible for the full programme of study including the period spent on the master's course. Note that the student is not eligible for postgraduate master's funding at the same time.

Where a student is not required to complete the first year of a '1+3' doctoral degree course or an integrated subject specialist doctorate* they must instead be registered on a separately designated doctoral degree course in order to be eligible for a Postgraduate Doctoral Loan. They must be undertaking the full designated course to be eligible.

*For example, due to prior attainment or time spent on a previous Level 7 research master's such as an MPhil or an MRes.

Eligible courses

- **Subject specialist doctorates.** A formal programme of study such as a PhD
- **Integrated subject specialist doctorates.** A supervised research project undertaken alongside a more structured taught course. It may instead depend on successful completion of taught elements and be undertaken in later years. Integrated doctorates normally offer exit awards at master's level based on successful completion of taught modules. Where an integrated doctorate has a Level 7 master's component, this should be included as part of the course duration for the doctoral course and should not be added as a separate master's course. *(Students must register for the doctoral degree at the outset to be eligible for a Postgraduate Doctoral Loan.)*
- **Professional and practice-based doctorates.** Post-experience qualifications aimed at mid-career professionals, for example an Engineering Doctorate (EngD).

Ineligible courses

- **Doctorates by publication:**
 - Doctorate by retrospective publication; or
 - Doctorate by prospective/concurrent publication.
- **Higher doctorates**

Qualification

A Postgraduate Doctoral Loan will be available for full postgraduate doctoral degree courses only. Eligible doctoral courses may be a combination of:

- Taught and research-based study
- Part-time and full-time study
- Periods of attendance and distance learning

It is not available for:

- Other Level 8 qualifications:
 - Level 8 awards
 - Level 8 certificates
 - Level 8 diplomas

- Lower level postgraduate courses:
 - Standalone master's degree
 - Integrated master's degree (a master's degree that is integrated with an undergraduate degree)
 - Postgraduate Certificate (PgCert)
 - Postgraduate Diploma (PgDip)

- Partial doctoral courses:
 - Where the student is topping up to a doctoral qualification and is not required to undertake the whole designated doctoral course.

Course structure

Some doctoral degrees are structured around a '1+3' model and, where this is the case, the following rules apply:

- As long as year one (the master's degree) is an integral part of the four-year doctoral degree course, and a student registers for the full doctoral degree course at the outset, they will be eligible for the £26,445 Postgraduate Doctoral Loan for that course. The student is not eligible for postgraduate master's funding for the first year of the course.
- If a student has already been awarded postgraduate master's funding for a separate master's course, they remain eligible for the full £26,445 Postgraduate Doctoral Loan to undertake a full '1+3' doctoral degree course.
- If a student is not required to complete the first year of a '1+3' doctoral degree course, they must instead be registered on a separately designated three-year doctoral degree course in order to be eligible for a Postgraduate Doctoral Loan.
- If a student withdraws from a '1+3' doctoral degree having accessed a Postgraduate Doctoral Loan, no matter the qualification they gain, they will have used their Postgraduate Doctoral Loan and will not be able to access another. This is subject to normal Compelling Personal Reasons (CPR) rules.

Note that, for postgraduate funding purposes, a student cannot transfer between master's and doctoral courses without submitting a new application for funding. A student must be undertaking the full course in order to be eligible for postgraduate funding in either case (master's or doctoral) and must submit a new application for funding where they start a new qualification.

Course length

Doctoral degree courses will only be eligible for postgraduate doctoral funding where the course length is between three and eight academic years (AYs) inclusive.

The course length is defined as the maximum period of registration for that particular course. This is normally linked to mode of study: for example, a course may be offered as three AYs full-time or six AYs part-time. The maximum registration period ends when the thesis is submitted for examination.

Payments will be scheduled over the three payment periods in every AY of the course.

Note that there is no 'extra weeks' element to a Postgraduate Doctoral Loan. The maximum loan amount available per AY is fixed regardless of the number of weeks of study undertaken in each AY.

Course name

For postgraduate doctoral courses, the course name should not be a generic doctoral course or the title of a student's thesis. The course name should include a unique identifier such as the subject or faculty, for example, civil engineering.

Academic years

The academic year is defined in the regulations as a 12-month period beginning on either 1 September, 1 January, 1 April or 1 July depending on when the course started.

The table below shows the academic years depending on the course start dates.

Date course started	Academic year
Between 1 August and 31 December	1 September - 31 August
Between 1 January and 31 March	1 January - 31 December
Between 1 April and 30 June	1 April - 31 March
Between 1 July and 31 July	1 July - 30 June

Term dates

Providers offering postgraduate doctoral courses are required to enter three sets of term dates for all years of study. This is to ensure that students accurately receive their funding payments throughout the period of their study.

The terms dates entered will drive the student's payment dates. Where you do not have terms, we still require three terms in our systems as SLC pays your students at three points throughout the academic year. You should create term dates that reflect as closely as possible the study pattern of your students. A suggestion would be that any holiday periods could be used as a natural term break.

Subject of study

There are no subject restrictions on doctoral degree courses. Any course, regardless of subject, can be eligible for a Postgraduate Doctoral Loan so long as it meets all other eligibility criteria.

Eligible HE providers

SFE students

Postgraduate doctoral funding will only be available from SFE for courses provided by UK higher education providers (HEPs) that are either registered with the Office for Students (OfS) and have research degree awarding powers (R-DAPs) or are authority-funded and have R-DAPs. Only providers that have been granted R-DAPs can award doctoral degrees. Those with taught degree awarding powers only cannot award doctoral degrees.

Validation arrangements:

Where an OfS-registered or authority-funded provider does not have R-DAPs (Provider A), they may enter a validation arrangement with an OfS-registered or authority-funded provider that does have R-DAPs (Provider B). In this instance, Provider B approves a programme of study offered by Provider A that contributes to the award of a doctoral qualification from Provider B. In validation arrangements, the degree-awarding body (Provider B) is ultimately responsible for the academic standards of any awards granted in its name and for the quality of the learning programme.

Franchise arrangements:

OfS-registered or authority-funded providers that have R-DAPs may enter into an arrangement with a third party, that is not registered with the OfS, to deliver a course on the behalf of the lead provider.

The franchisee may deliver all or part of a programme approved and owned by the institution with R-DAPs. The franchising institution (the provider with R-DAPs) retains overall control of the programme's content, delivery, assessment and quality assurance arrangements.

Where the course is provided by more than one HEP the student must be registered with the lead institution that is awarding the qualification.

SFW students

Postgraduate doctoral funding will only be available from SFW for courses that are automatically designated within the postgraduate doctoral regulations and are provided by UK higher education providers (HEPs) that are either publicly-funded with research degree awarding powers (R-DAPs) or OfS-registered with an Access and Participation Plan with R-DAPs. Only providers that have been granted R-DAPs can award doctoral degrees. Those with taught degree awarding powers only cannot award doctoral degrees.

The Welsh Ministers may specifically designate courses at publicly-funded or OfS-registered providers that do not have R-DAPs and offer postgraduate doctoral courses. The Welsh Government and Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) will inform SLC of any specifically designated courses.

Validation arrangements:

Where a publicly-funded provider or OfS-registered provider with an Access and Participation Plan does not have R-DAPs (Provider A) they may enter a validation arrangement with a publicly-funded provider or OfS registered provider that does have R-DAPs (Provider B). In such an arrangement, Provider B approves a programme of study offered by Provider A that contributes to the award of a doctoral qualification from Provider B. In validation arrangements, the degree-awarding body (Provider B) is ultimately responsible for the academic standards of any awards granted in its name and for the quality of the learning programme.

Franchise arrangements:

Publicly-funded providers with R-DAPs or OfS-registered providers with an Access and Participation Plan may enter into franchise arrangements with publicly-funded providers or OfS-registered providers. In this arrangement, the franchisee may deliver all or part of a programme approved and owned by the institution with R-DAPs. The franchising institution (the provider with R-DAPs) retains overall control of the programme's content, delivery, assessment and quality assurance arrangements.

The Welsh Ministers may also specifically designate courses at alternative providers offering postgraduate doctoral courses in Wales. The Welsh Government and HEFCW will inform SLC of any specifically designated courses at alternative providers based in Wales.

Where an alternative provider has R-DAPs, their courses must be specifically designated and approved by the Welsh Ministers to be eligible for support. These courses are not subject to automatic designation. Alternative providers with R-DAPs should not upload courses for Welsh-domiciled students until they have been specifically designated by Welsh Government and HEFCW.

Where the course is provided by more than one HEP the student must be registered with the lead institution that is awarding the qualification.

In attendance/distance learning

Students may be eligible for a Postgraduate Doctoral Loan if they are:

- in attendance; or
- distance learning

Where the course is a distance learning course, the student must be resident in England or Wales* on the first day of the first AY of the course. This rule applies to all residency categories.

Where a course includes a period of overseas study, at least 50% of study time over the whole course must be undertaken within the UK.

* Note the exception to this rule for UK Armed Forces personnel who are posted outside of their place of domicile and certain family members who are living with them during the posting. These applicants are considered to be temporarily resident at the posting address and will be considered to be ordinarily resident in the place they resided prior to moving to the posting location for student funding purposes.

Adding intakes

When creating a new course, once all term dates have been entered for all years of that course there is an option to add another intake of this course. This would mean that if the course that is being created is a September start course, a separate intake for the same course which starts at a later date in the academic year (i.e. January) can also be entered. You cannot add an intake once a course has been saved so it is advisable to add all intakes before saving the course. Up to twelve intakes can be created under a Postgraduate Doctoral course – only one per month. If required, the first intake month can be amended when saving in the new academic year. For example, if your course had a September intake in the previous AY, this can be amended to October in the new academic year.

Available course years

The Available Course Years functionality is available for all full-time and part-time postgraduate courses.

The two settings are as follows:

- All Students
- No Students

Due to the Apply Once nature of postgraduate applications, providers should set their courses to No Students rather than closing courses to ensure continuing students still receive their funding. This also allows students to be transferred on/off the courses if required. If a course has been closed continuing students will not receive their funding in the following years of their course.