

Applicant information for RHUL PhD Social Purpose Studentship

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Deadlines

Deadline for PhD applications: 26th October, 2024

Interviews for shortlisted applicants: 26th October to 5th November, 2024 (dates will vary by Department)

Decisions letters to applicants: 20th November, 2024

Start date: 13th January, 2025

Where to apply

New applicants

- Apply directly through the [Royal Holloway Applicant Portal](#).

Applicants currently registered as a PhD student at Royal Holloway

If you are a current unfunded PhD student in your first year (e.g., started September/October 2024), you are eligible to apply for this studentship opportunity, apply using MS Forms [here](#).

Background

To be a forward-thinking University of Social Purpose, we have a commitment to enabling and building best practices of outstanding educational and student experience; research and innovation; and local and global engagement with partners. We look to drive social change, development of policies, business practices for a better, more inclusive future.

We have developed and established these PhD studentships as part of our commitment to being a University of Social Purpose. We are investing in developing the diverse skills and experiences needed for future leaders across the field of research and innovation.

Funding information

Funding is 3.5 years duration (full-time equivalent), covers home MPhil/PhD fees and a UKRI-rate stipend (£21,237 for 2024/25). Applicants must be eligible for UK home fees. **We are unable to accept applications for overseas students for this funding.**

What does a PhD of Social Purpose look like?

Successful applicants will join a cohort of post-graduate researchers (PGRs) from across the University as part of our RHUL Social Purpose Centre for Doctoral Training. Each PGR will be working on a PhD Project that is designed to have a social purpose. We take a broad and inclusive approach to identifying Social Purpose across all our areas of strength in the University, but applicants must demonstrate a clear connection between their proposed research, a key social challenge, and potential beneficiaries of the project. It will be important to understand the 'Why' we must do this work, whether it be to drive innovation, support commitment to sustainability or responsible use of AI, address a mental health crisis, address inequalities, etc.

Importantly, we also see the design of the PGR experience as having a Social Purpose. PGRs will be expected to complete a placement (up to 3 months) or a piece of challenge-led work (e.g., address an issue identified by an external partner), they will engage in multidisciplinary events developing communication skills, and training to prepare PhD candidates for their future careers, whether that is in academia or beyond. Each PGR will benefit from having a supervision team (minimum two RHUL supervisors) to support their PhD journey.

Expectations for the PhD Research Project

- Project must have a clear alignment to Social Purpose.
- Project must have minimum of two RHUL co-supervisors.
- Project must be designed to allow time for: an integrated placement or a piece of challenge led work (max 3 months), and for submission within the funded timeline, and engagement with wider University activities (e.g., Doctoral School training, Doctoral School Annual Conference).
- The studentships will be student-led, so they are not applying direct to a particular named project, but to work with a supervisory team.

Expectations for PGR if awarded this funding

- The PGR is committed to engaging in on campus activities and events, engaging with the wider PhD program, which goes beyond focusing and progressing their PhD study, including cohort development activities, and activities that will support their wider development (e.g., researcher training, teaching training, wellbeing, knowledge exchange).
- The PGR must complete a minimum of 10 days of training (development activities) per year, including Social Purpose CDT Cohort training.
- The PGR will complete a placement or a piece of challenge-led work (agreed with their supervisor and the RHUL cohort lead) within a maximum time-period of 3 months.
- The PGR will showcase their wider development activities in the new alternative thesis format in section 13, paragraph (18) (c) of the PGR regulations, with an expectation of at least 3 detailed sections that demonstrate learning and skills development. Note that for a creative writing or poetic practice thesis, for which this regulation is currently not an option, we would expect that reflections on learning and skills development be included within the critical/theoretical writing section.

Supervision team supporting PGRs

If you are successful in being awarded a studentship, to ensure you are supported on your PhD journey, your nominated supervisors will:

- Have completed the Royal Holloway Supervisor Training Module on Moodle that outlines RHUL process, expectations and support available for RHUL PGRs.
- Have completed EDI training within the last 3 years.
- Complete, with successful PGRs, a Training Needs Analysis (see [here](#)) within 1 month of you starting.

Completing your application (deadline 26th October, 2024)

You will be expected to submit your application using the RHUL Submission Portal ([here](#)).

As part of your application, in addition to the information requested, you will be required to submit the following documents (more information on each is below):

- Personal statement
- Research project proposal
- Supervisor letter
- CV
- Qualification transcripts

Preparing your personal statement (500 words maximum)

What are we looking for in your personal statement

The panel will be looking to understand your experience and motivation for wanting to do a PhD, and in particular the PhD project you have proposed, and your preparedness for completing a PhD.

What to include in your personal statement

You may consider highlighting the following:

- Why would you like to complete a PhD
- Why would you like to complete this particular PhD
- How has your past experience contributed to your decision to do a PhD (what are bringing to the PhD)
- What past experience will support you in completing your PhD successfully
- What do you hope to gain from completing the PhD

Research project proposal (4 pages maximum with minimum font size 11, plus 1 page for references)

What are we looking for in your research project proposal

The panel will be looking to understand your research project plans, how the research aligns with Social Purpose, and that the work is sufficiently thought through that you may complete within 3.5 years.

What to include in your research project proposal

You are expected to include the following:

- **Statement at the top: “I am applying for a RHUL PhD Student Purpose Studentship” of page 1**
- Project title
- Statement on how the project addresses Social Purpose (max 250 words).
- Project background (e.g., outline key background information to showcase where your project will address a gap in the field, or add to what is known).
- Aim of your research project
- Design of your research project and how will support you in addressing your aims

- Planned timeline for work to be completed; this does not need to be very detailed but should show progression of the work to be completed, including placement, across the 3.5 years
- Outline supervision team and what each will bring to the project
- Details on any research funding support that will be required to support your PhD project and/or training, and where these funds will be secured (your supervision team will be able to support you with identifying what research and training funds will be required as well as what opportunities for funding support will be within the department and/or school).
- Details, if appropriate, of any external partners (charity, organisations) you will be working with as part of this project or for your placement (if already sourced). Note that it is not necessary that you have an external partner, nor that you have an agreed placement arranged at this stage.
- Outline of ethical considerations (max 250 words).

Supervisor letter (1 page maximum)

What are we looking for in the supervisor letter

The panel will be looking to understand your primary supervisors' assessment of your readiness for doctoral study, the fit between your proposed project and your supervision team (linking to feasibility), and the fit of your proposed project to Royal Holloway's commitments as a University of Social Purpose.

What to include in the supervisor letter

Supervisor letters should include:

- Details on their assessment of the applicant.
- Details on how they will support the applicant to be successful in their doctoral studies (e.g., comment on applicant development needs, what each supervisor will contribute to supporting applicant, how the supervisors will work together, any other relevant information to supporting the applicant's success).
- Reflection on how the proposal demonstrates a clear connection between the research project, a key social challenge, and potential beneficiaries of the project.

Preparing your CV

What are we looking for in your CV

The panel will be looking to understand your preparedness to complete a PhD and where you may have development needs.

What to include in your CV

Below are some prompts to help you to think about if you have information to add on different areas to showcase your experience, background and training.

It is not expected (nor necessary) that you will have something to say on all of these.

- Academic qualifications
- Work experience (paid)
- Work experience (unpaid)

- Publications
- Conferences/invited talks
- Awards/Recognitions
- Training and skills

Assessment Criteria

Applications will be assessed on the following three criteria:

1. **Applicant preparedness (40%).** Your application will be assessed to understand how your previous experiences have prepared you for postgraduate study and research. To assess this, we will review past academic achievement(s), CV, Personal statement (contribution of life experience as well as academic and/or professional experience), and supervisor supporting statement.
2. **Quality and feasibility of PhD proposal (40%).** Your application will be assessed on: the ideas presented that underpin the proposal, concept and design of the research, novelty, feasibility of research being completed within the funded time period (with the inclusion of an internship in this period), advancement of work in the current field, potential impact, expertise of supervision team and plans for how they will work together to support the project, feasibility of necessary training, fieldwork, lab work, study trips planned, etc. To assess this, we will review your project proposal, personal statement (reasons for pursuing this project), and supervisor supporting statement.
3. **Project fit with social purpose (20%).** Your application will be assessed on the extent to which aligns to our commitments as a University of Social Purpose. To assess this, we will review your summary statement, research proposal, supervisor supporting statement.