Guidance on how to apply for an SSA-funded PhD studentship

Application round 27 May–30 July 2026

The application form is structured in the following way:

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Please read the information below before you apply. If you have any questions, please get in touch using our enquiry form.

The SSA are committed to providing an inclusive and accessible application process. If you require any reasonable adjustments or assistance to complete the application form, please contact Graham Hunt.

Page one: Contact details

Name, address, email and phone number
For information only. Please use the address where you currently reside and an email address that will remain active throughout the application process.

Page two: Eligibility

Overall eligibility requirements
The criteria below apply to all funding schemes in this round of funding.
Will you be UK resident for the duration of your studies?
Eligibility Yes = eligible for this funding No = not eligible for this funding
What UK Nation will you be based in?
Information This question will only show if you have selected ‘Yes in the previous question. England Northern Ireland Scotland Wales
What region of England will you be based in?
Information This question will only show if you have selected ‘England’ in the previous question. North East North West Yorkshire and the Humber East Midlands West Midlands East of England London South East South West
Will you be based at a UK university?
Eligibility Yes = eligible for this funding No = not eligible for this funding
What UK nation is your university based in?
Information This question will only show if you have selected ‘Yes in the previous question. England Northern Ireland

Scotland
Wales

What region of England is your university based in?

Information

This question will only show if you have selected 'England' in the previous question.

North East
North West
Yorkshire and the Humber
East Midlands
West Midlands
East of England
London
South East
South West

Do you already have a first, an upper-second (2:1) class, a master's degree in a relevant subject, or equivalent clinical research experience?

Eligibility
Yes – master's degree = eligible for this funding
Yes – equivalent clinical research experience = eligible for this funding *(please provide further explanation in the Eligibility clarifications box below)*
No = not eligible for this funding

Date you completed or expect to complete your master's degree in a relevant subject

This question will only show if you have selected 'Yes – master's degree' in the previous question.

Course title and university for your master's degree

This question will only show if you have selected 'Yes – master's degree' in the previous question.

Eligibility clarifications

Eligibility

This box will show up depending on your answers to the above questions. It is for you to explain any relevant details and potentially mitigating factors. Your answer here will be reviewed alongside your answers above when the SSA considers your eligibility for funding under this scheme. If you have previously spoken to the SSA about your eligibility for this scheme, please provide details of that conversation here.

(200 words)

Conflicts of interest

Have you been employed by, or received funding from, non-pharmaceutical addictive product industries?

Addictive product industries are defined as businesses, people or other legal entities that make money from selling, promoting or lobbying to promote use of non-pharmaceutical, addictive products. This includes, but is not limited to, the alcohol, non-pharmaceutical cannabis, gambling, non-pharmaceutical nicotine (e.g. vaping) and tobacco industries.

Eligibility

No = eligible for this funding

The SSA does not fund people who are employed by, or who receive money from, addictive product industries.

Please declare any potential conflicts of interest

You should declare any and all financial, professional, personal or other interests that relate you. This should include specific conflicts that relate to your proposed area of research as well as conflicts that relate to addictive products and behaviours overall.

Eligibility

Specific conflicts of interest are those relating to your research product - for example, if your research focuses on technology in which you hold a financial stake. General conflicts of interest relate to any kind of interest you hold in relation to addictive products and industries.

Your answer will be reviewed by the SSA's conflicts of interest subcommittee once your application has been submitted. The SSA reserves the right not to fund people and projects where it deems the risks from conflicts of interest are too great.

If the SSA later discovers a conflict of interest that has not been declared here, it reserves the right to review and potentially cease funding at that time.

(500 words)

Declare any actual or potential conflicts of interest that relate to your supervisor and supervisory team

You should declare any and all financial, professional, personal or other interests that they hold, and that relate either to your proposed research or to addictive products and behaviours in general.

Eligibility

Specific conflicts of interest are those relating to your research product - for example, if your research focuses on technology in which your supervisor holds a financial stake. General conflicts of interest relate to any kind of interest your supervisor may hold in relation to addictive product industries.

Your answer will be reviewed by the SSA's conflicts of interest subcommittee once your application has been submitted. The SSA reserves the right not to fund people and projects where it deems the risks from conflicts of interest are too great.

If the SSA later discovers a conflict of interest that has not been declared here, it reserves the right to review and potentially cease funding at that time.

(500 words)

Addiction Healthcare Goals eligibility
The criteria below will be used to assess your eligibility for the Addiction Healthcare Goals funding. Applicants who are not eligible will still be considered for other PhD funding through the SSA. For more information on Addiction Healthcare Goals eligibility criteria, please see the flagship research leadership programme eligibility section of the SSA's PhD webpage.
Does your research focus on illicit drugs and/or alcohol?
Eligibility Yes = eligible for Addiction Healthcare Goals funding No = not eligible for Addiction Healthcare Goals funding
Does your research focus on primary prevention?
Eligibility Yes = not eligible for Addiction Healthcare Goals funding No = eligible for Addiction Healthcare goals funding
Is the primary focus on research that will have a demonstrable impact on addiction treatment, recovery or reduction of addiction related harms?
Eligibility Yes = eligible for Addiction Healthcare Goals funding No = not eligible for Addiction Healthcare Goals funding

Describe the impact that your PhD will have on addiction treatment, recovery or reduction of addiction related harms.
Eligibility This question will only show if you have passed the eligibility checks in the previous three questions. Use this section to outline how your research will have a demonstrable impact on addiction treatment, recovery or reduction of addiction related harms. We particularly encourage research on populations that meet dependence (ICD) or moderate-severe use disorder (DSM-5) criteria. (500 words)
Please select if you are applying for a clinical PhD Information Clinical PhDs are for people who work in a registered profession and who practice in a local authority or public health setting. Registered professions include (but are not limited to) nurses, midwives, pharmacists, doctors and dentists.
For information and application form routing. If you select 'clinical PhD', you will be routed to see questions that relate to clinical PhDs only.

Alcohol and mental health eligibility
This funding round includes dedicated funding for research focused on alcohol and mental health. The criteria below will be used to assess eligibility for this funding. Applicants who are not eligible will still be considered for other PhD funding.
Does your research focus on alcohol and mental health?
Eligibility Yes = eligible for alcohol and mental health funding No = not eligible for alcohol and mental health funding

Page three: About you

This set of questions should be viewed as one section and replace a formal CV. You should use these to demonstrate that you bring high levels of relevant motivation, skills, and experiences to your proposed PhD.
Please describe what motivates you to undertake this PhD and why you are best placed to do it.
Assessment This could include why you believe the research is necessary and how you identified it as such as well as what you bring to the topic. Please consider personal, professional and intellectual factors. (250 words)
What skills will you bring to this PhD?
Assessment This could include academic achievements, qualifications and training courses as well as skills you have developed through professional and personal experiences. (250 words)
What experiences will you bring to this PhD?
Assessment This could include your work and academic history, positions of responsibility, commitments such as reviewing, committee work and voluntary positions. (250 words)
Additional information
Assessment Use this section to add anything not covered in the above sections, as well as to provide context such as career breaks, secondments or voluntary work. (500 words)
Please enter your ORCiD number
Assessment If you do not already have an ORCiD, please see guidance here on how to create one. https://orcid.org/register
Please enter the URL for your ORCiD profile
Assessment If you do not already have an ORCiD, please see guidance here on how to create one. https://orcid.org/register

Page four: Project plan

Title of your proposed PhD

Information only

This is the title we will use in correspondence throughout your application. It should relate closely to your project plan.

Lay summary (in plain English) of your proposed PhD

Assessment

This should be written so that people who are unfamiliar with your subject area and research methods can understand your project. Prepare this section as if you were speaking to someone with no prior knowledge of addiction.

You should avoid technical or specialist terminology, instead using short sentences and simple language. Provide examples or comparisons where they help explain complex ideas.

For your research to have an impact you must be able to communicate complex ideas so that they resonate outside of research or specialist settings. This section will assess your ability to do this.

(500 words)

PhD project plan (information box)

The project plan should be no longer than 2,000 words (excluding references).
There is no word limit or preferred citation style for references. All should contain a DOI where available.
All information should be contained within the document; reviewers will not click on hyperlinks included within the text.

The project plan should cover the following:

- background (brief summary of the relevant literature)
- a statement of testable hypotheses (or equivalent)
- the study design or structure
- research methods and instruments
- a data analysis plan, including your current proficiency with those methods
- training and career development activities planned for your PhD (please include estimated costs)
- expected scientific outcomes
- methods of dissemination
- expected impact on policy and practice

Please upload your PhD project plan here (max. 2,000 words excluding references)

Assessment

This must be a pdf document.

This is the most important element of your application and will be read thoroughly by the assessment panel, the funders, and by the experts asked to review your application. You should ensure that this document is thoroughly reviewed with your supervisors before you upload it to your application.

Your project plan should contain all the items listed above. It will also be assessed on the following

- How suitable the plan is for a three-year PhD? Is it feasible to complete the work in that time as well as being sufficiently ambitious?
- Are the research methods, data sources and any statistical methods appropriate to test the hypothesis?
- Are the risks in this project understood and managed appropriately?
- What is the likely impact of the research?

(pdf document upload)

Upload your projected PhD timeline as a Gantt chart, including any tasks, dependencies between tasks, and the timeline for completing them

Assessment

This must be a pdf document.

This will provide supporting detail in relation to your project plan and will be assessed alongside that document. You should ensure that all elements of your project plan are covered by your timeline document. This is where you can demonstrate the ambition of your research alongside the feasibility of the project plan. You should also use this document to explain how you would deal with any anticipated delays (e.g., ethical approval or data collection).

(pdf document upload)

Please describe how your PhD will contribute towards your career goals

Assessment

The SSA and Addiction Healthcare Goals are both committed to developing careers in addiction science research leadership. You should use this space to outline your career goals and how the PhD will help you to achieve those goals. Explain what you plan to do next and the impact that your career will have on the sector.

(350 words)

What input have you received so far from people with lived/living experience of addiction, and/or what contributions do you plan to incorporate throughout your PhD?

Assessment

Both elements of this should be covered in your answer. Input received so far and further input planned throughout the PhD. If you have not received input from people

with lived experience, then you should use this space to explain the reasons or rationale for this.

Through your PhD, the SSA can support you in how best to incorporate the views of people with lived experience of addiction into your research.

(500 words)

Date you intend to start your PhD

Information only

This should represent a date that the university has approved in principle. If you have already started your PhD, you can select a date in the past.

Date you expect to complete your PhD

Information only

This should be three years after the start date unless you are planning to undertake a part-time PhD.

PhDs funded by Addiction Healthcare Goals must be completed by 31 September 2031. PhDs funded under other schemes can extend beyond this date.

Are you planning to complete your PhD on a full- or part-time basis?

Information only

If part-time, please indicate the percentage basis

Information only

The percentage entered here should match the length of time indicated by the start and end dates. For example, a 100% PhD would take three years, a 50% PhD would take six years.

Page five: Funding

Clinical PhDs only: **What percentage of your PhD time will be reserved for clinical work?**
Information only The SSA will pay full clinical salaries where applicants maintain 20% clinical work alongside their PhD. If a higher percentage of clinical work is proposed, then supplementary information must be provided about how this will be funded.
Clinical PhDs only: **Please provide any relevant details about your clinical work, including variations, support you will receive, other payments, and expected time commitments.**
Information only Use this space to provide supplementary information about your clinical work and any details about that work that are relevant to your PhD application. (300 words)
Provide information about your proposed stipend (/salary for clinical PhDs), tuition fees and research costs Please give full stipend/salary costs for each year of your PhD (including detail on increments), with a breakdown of the following: • Basic salary (grade and amount) • National Insurance (NI) and superannuation/pension scheme contributions • London weighting if appropriate
Information only The SSA bases its stipend and tuition fee payments on UKRI levels. For clinical applicants this will be based on your clinical salary. Please provide details about which band point (or similar) and salary structure your employer uses. (500 words)

Page six: Supervisory team

Academic host institution and department
Information only
Please confirm that you have discussed your application with the relevant research finance officer at your host institution
Requirement You must have your PhD agreed in principle within your host institution.
Describe the reasons for selecting this institution and the benefits it will bring to your proposed PhD
Information and assessment You should be based within a UK university for the duration of your PhD. The university and department should be appropriate for your research. Use this space to demonstrate a good fit between you planned study and your host institution. This may be in terms of area or methodological specialism or access to facilities that are crucial for your PhD. It may also relate to the locality and the ability to study specific needs or a local population. (300 words)
Primary PhD supervisor
Information only This should be your primary supervisor for the duration of your PhD
Supervisor's correspondence address
Information only Please provide an address where the SSA can contact your supervisor, this will usually be a work address.
Supervisor's email address
Information only Please provide an email address where the SSA can contact your supervisor, this should be a work email address, and the domain should match the research institution where they are based. After you submit your form, the SSA will send a copy of your supervisor’s support letter to them using the email address provided here.
Previous success of supervisor
Assessment

The previous success and experience of your supervisor are important. You should demonstrate that they have sufficient experience in successfully supervising researchers as well as appropriate subject or methodological experience to provide effective leadership for your PhD.

(200 words)

Please provide details of any additional members of your supervisory team, including their name, affiliation, and the expertise they will contribute

Information and assessment

As above, you should demonstrate that your team has the subject matter and methodological expertise to support you throughout your PhD. The details included in this section should align with the needs arising from your project plan.

(200 words)

Please upload a letter from your academic supervisor at the university

This must be a pdf document

Please ensure it contains statements confirming:
- your suitability for the PhD
- that your proposed research aligns with their research group's interests and expertise
- that they would be willing to supervise your PhD if your application is successful
- that the university would be willing to host your PhD if your application is successful

Assessment
As indicated above, please note that after you submit your application, the support letter will be sent to your supervisor so they can confirm its contents. Your supervisor should include all the elements listed above. It is essential that they confirm the university is willing to host your PhD.

(pdf document upload)

Have you applied for / been granted funding by any other source for your PhD?

Information only

Please give details about other applications or funding or enter 'none' if not applicable.

(300 words)

Page seven: Reference

Please provide details of one referee who can comment on your suitability for a PhD. This should be someone from outside your supervisory team.

We will contact your referee asking them for a support statement after the closing deadline on the 30 July, so please make sure the contact details you provide are correct and that the person named here knows to expect an email at that time. To avoid delays with your application, please ensure that they have prepared their statement and are ready to send it.

This section is for information only, however, the person named should be in a position to provide a compelling reference. They should know your work, your ability to study at a PhD level, and should work in a position of sufficient authority so that they are able to recommend you for the PhD. This will usually be a previous employer, supervisor or mentor and not a colleague, supervisee or employee.

The reference should address:

- the proposed research plan
- the applicant's work to date
- the applicant's potential for contributing to addiction science

Name

Information only

Please state your referee's full name and title.

Job title/position

Information only

Please state your referee's current job title and workplace or institution in which they are based. If they are retired, this should be their most recent position and workplace or institution.

Address

Information only

Please provide an address where the SSA can contact your referee, this will usually be a work address.

Email address

Information only

Please provide an email address where the SSA can contact your supervisor, this should be a work email address, and the domain should match the research institution where they are based.

Page eight: Declarations

Did you use AI to prepare this application?
Information You must declare the extent to which you have used AI to prepare this application. Some use of AI is permitted. The majority and substance of the work should, however, be yours. Please note that presenting work that is not your own without proper attribution constitutes plagiarism and could result in your application being rejected. Yes No
Please describe how you used AI in preparing this application.
This question will only show if you have answered 'Yes' to the previous question. Information Some use of AI is permitted. The majority and substance of the work should, however, be yours. Please note that presenting work that is not your own without proper attribution constitutes plagiarism and could result in your application being rejected. (200 words)
Signature
Information As above, this constitutes a declaration that the application is your own work and that all elements that are not your own have been suitable attributed; that all answers have been truthfully answered and that you have not knowingly misled or withheld important information at any point in the application form.
Where did you hear about this opportunity?
Information SSA website SSA newsletter SSA social media (including LinkedIn) Jobs.ac.uk Drink and Drugs News Magazine Word of Mouth Other (Please specify)
Diversity monitoring re-direct

When you submit this form, you will be re-directed to a diversity monitoring form. This information is collected to monitor how diverse the field of applicants is and whether the recruitment process is fair.

The diversity monitoring form is a mandatory part of the application process. However, you have a right not to disclose sensitive personal information and can do this via selecting 'Prefer not to say' for any of the answers.

Data collected on the diversity monitoring form are kept securely and are separate from the funding decision-making process.

Information for you

The information you provide on the diversity monitoring form will be held separately from your application form and will not be shared with reviewers. The data privacy notice for this funding scheme can be found here.

We use diversity monitoring data to identify potential funding inequalities so that those inequalities can be addressed by future targeted funding schemes.