

Institutional Sift Panels: Selection Criteria for Studentship Proposals



Deadline for submission to ARIES: midday 15 September 2023

Overview

- Individual ARIES Hosting Partners have responsibility for collating proposals and convening an Institutional Sift Panel to assess and rank order the proposals they wish to submit.
- The institutional representative to the ARIES Strategy Board must either Chair (preferably), or be a member of, the Institutional Sift Panel.
- All proposals should be considered by at least two members of staff with experience in PGR research and training. They should not have any conflict of interest in making their assessment. We recommend a significantly larger panel than this minimum to cover the range of theme areas of proposals, and to spread the workload.
- Institutes should note the requirements of the [ARIES Equality and Diversity Statement](#) in the formation and operation of sift panels.

Sift Panels are required to:

- Score the quality of proposals against stated criteria
- Reject any that are out of scope, or do not meet all criteria to a high standard
- Consider the quality of the advertisement, noting that this can be crucial in successfully recruiting high quality applicants, rejecting or returning for improvement any that are not deemed excellent
- Examine the requested research costs (RTSG) against the criteria given, rejecting any that require excessive or unnecessary expenditure. ARIES places a notional value of £8,000 for each RTSG, but costs must be justified in the proposal. Requests in excess of this value should be considered noting that there is an expectation that each organisation will submit proposals with an average RTSG of £8,000 to the DTP
- Determine if all Primary Supervisors are eligible for funding according to both institutional and DTP criteria (see below)

Sift panel chairs/institutional representatives to the ARIES Strategy Board are required to:

Send a completed **ARIES Institutional Sift Report form** to aries.dtp@uea.ac.uk by the deadline (12:00; 15 September 2023):

Project selection criteria

The Sift Panels should consider the following in making their selection:

Proposals must **fall within the NERC remit**. Projects should also fit within at least one of the five [ARIES Research Themes](#). Projects at the borders between NERC science and that of other Research Councils are also welcome. These latter proposals could be submitted for joint funding through one of our collaborative funding schemes; currently these exist with the BBSRC Norwich Research Park (NRP) and ESRC South East Network for Social Sciences (SeNSS) DTPs (see separate announcements).

The following quality criteria, which are equally weighted, are to be used to score/rank the project. Any project submitted to ARIES which fails to meet all criteria to a high standard will be rejected by the Strategy Board, and/or returned for improvement.

1. Quality of the Scientific Experience

Proposals should demonstrate

- the student will be engaged on a rewarding and relevant research project that will provide them with a first class research experience
- clearly articulated aims, objectives and focus
- research methodology that is appropriate and well defined
- scientific rigour in its approach
- that the project will clearly enable the student to demonstrate a level of independence and originality, to test ideas and hypotheses, and to make a contribution to learning that would be potentially worthy of publication.

2. Suitability and Feasibility

The project should be well-suited to a PhD and have a reasonable element of “security” in that due progress can be made within the time constraints, and by a student who may be undertaking research for the first time. Risks to the completion of the project should be identified, and robust contingency plans described. The project must be feasible and achievable within the given limitations (including financial constraints). A high-quality research environment must be evidenced to support the student on all levels (e.g. intellectually and practically).

3. Training

Proposals should demonstrate a high level of commitment to excellence in provision of appropriate and necessary research training by the Supervisory team and their research groupings. Training should lead to the development of advanced research skills, and not necessarily only within the narrower focus of the project, i.e. they should also be multidisciplinary, as well as developing more generic/transferable skills

The advertisement should be compelling and intelligible to potential applicants. A good proposal should articulate:

- What is the problem to be solved, why is this important, and why now?
- What are the objectives of the project/student? What will the student do and how will this lead to the student meeting the objectives?
- What training opportunities might the student have?
- If your project involves collaboration, why/how is this a strength? And what are the (complementary) strengths of the members of the supervisory team?
- Is there an established research group that the student will be joining?

Final selection

Final acceptance of projects submitted by the Sift Panels is made by the ARIES Strategy Board, which reserves the right to reject proposals or return them for amendment.

Primary Supervisor eligibility

The eligibility criteria for Primary Supervisors are that they:

- are employed by, and usually based at, an ARIES hosting partner institute or department (honorary appointments do not usually comply)
- have a track record of research aligned to the NERC remit as evidenced by submission of research grant applications in the last 5 years to UK Research Councils, European Commission and Research Council, other UK or overseas government agencies, or similar bodies (charities, industry, etc.), in these relevant areas (unless they are new investigators - see below)
- have a peer-reviewed publication record of research in the NERC remit in international journals which would be deemed “internationally excellent” or “world leading” according to current REF criteria
- would normally be eligible to be a PhD Primary Supervisor according to their institute’s criteria for institutionally-funded studentships
- have undertaken approved professional development training in relation to their supervisory role within the last 3 years
- have a 100% record of formal progress reporting for at least the previous 12 months for all of their PGR students.

In addition:

- Supervisors may **only submit one project proposal per year** where they are named as the Primary Supervisor, but there is no limit to the number of projects that can be submitted each year in which they are named as a co-supervisor. Primary supervisors are permitted to apply for one additional studentship to be considered for joint funding with the BBSRC NRP or ESRC SeNSS DTPs
- Where an inexperienced primary supervisor is proposed (e.g. a new investigator), a more experienced supervisor will need to be nominated to the supervisory team.

Other institutional eligibility rules may be applied.

Supervisory teams and advisors

Supervisory teams must comprise a Primary Supervisor and at least two more members. For PGRs hosted by non-HEI Partners, the second supervisor must be based at, and employed by, the HEI of registration. All PGRs should have access to at least two supervisors at the institute in which they are primarily located. For CASE and Collaborative awards, the external partners will provide a supervisor to the team.