

Institutional Sift Panels: Selection Criteria for Studentship Proposals



Deadline for submission to ARIES: midday 10 September 2024

For every proposal submitted, we ask that you ensure that the submitting PI complete the ARIES DEI form: <https://bit.ly/3UIW47Q>

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 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. Please note the ARIES policy on computational costs.
- 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 (midday 10 September 2024).

Project selection criteria

Project selection criteria

Proposals must fall within the NERC remit. Projects should also fit within at least one of the five ARIES Research Themes (see <https://www.aries-dtp.ac.uk/work-with-us/aries-research-themes/>).

The following criteria, which are equally weighted, are used to score the project:

1. Quality of the Scientific Experience

- Proposals should demonstrate that the PGR will be engaged on a **rewarding and relevant** research project that will provide them with a first-class research experience, and provide the opportunity for PGRs to develop the research as the PhD progresses.
- The proposal should have clearly articulated aims, objectives, and focus.
- The research methodology should be appropriate and well defined, and demonstrate scientific rigour in its approach.
- The project should enable the PGR to demonstrate a level of independence and originality, to test ideas and hypotheses, and to make a contribution to learning that is worthy of publication.

2. Suitability and Feasibility

- The project should have clear aims that provide opportunities for intellectual challenge whilst having security in that due progress can be made within the time constraints¹, and by a PGR who may be undertaking research for the first time.
- The project should be feasible within the given resource limitations (including financial constraints), and achievable within the given time frame.
- Risks to the completion of the project should be identified, and robust contingency plans described that would allow the PGR to successfully conclude a programme of doctoral level research in the event of delays to, or failure of, the original work plan.
- A high-quality research environment exists that will support the PGR on all levels (e.g. intellectually, practically, and with respect to protected characteristics).

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.
- Please note all supervisors will be required to sign up to, and comply with, the to the ARIES Supervisory Charter.

The advertisement should be compelling and intelligible to potential applicants, and meet all requirements given in the form.

¹ We recommend that submission of thesis is planned to coincide with the end of the funded period: in most cases 3.5 years.

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.

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 school/department.
- 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 that 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.
- are in compliance with NERC and DTP requirements.

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.
- 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 apply.

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.

Collaboration

ARIES encourages all PIs to look for opportunities to collaborate *across different institutions and organisations*. **Collaboration** can be via providing supervisory expertise, access to equipment or processes, CASE supervision and funding, and co-developing specific research projects. These opportunities may involve financial assistance. ARIES requires 70% of studentships funded to be collaborative.

CASE: Any organisation that is **not eligible for NERC funding** may be a CASE partner, whether or not they are an ARIES partner. The PGR is required to spend a minimum of three months with the CASE partner at the partner’s cost. The CASE partner is requested to provide a minimum of £1,000 per year towards the PGR’s research costs. This must be agreed in writing at point of submission. Where multiple collaborative partners

are involved in a research project, it is possible to split these requirements across different partners. ARIES requires 35% of funded studentships to be CASE.

Match-funding: Any organisation may offer match-funding at a rate of 50% of the studentship (although this is not necessary for all proposed projects). This equates to around £45,000 over the lifetime of the PhD. This can come from the organisation of which the primary supervisor is part, or from external organisations. Studentships with confirmed match-funding will be prioritised for funding so long as the candidate is ranked in the top 2/3 of the candidates in a given year.