



Leverhulme Centenary Doctoral Scholarships

Internal Application Guidance

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This guidance document has been produced by the Postgraduate Research Office in consultation with the Research Strategy Office to support the development of proposals to deliver the Leverhulme Centenary Doctoral Scholarships on behalf of the University of Cambridge.

Experience of supporting historic bids has been used, in conjunction with information published by the Leverhulme Trust (summarised in the Appendix), to develop this guidance.

Introduction

The [Leverhulme Doctoral Scholarships](#) call is due to open on 3rd November 2025, with a deadline of 6th March 2026. Ten awards of up to £5 million will be made to UK universities in this round, with each award funding up to 30 Leverhulme Doctoral Scholarships in an interdisciplinary priority research area for that institution.

The chosen area should be sufficiently broad to sustain up to 30 doctoral students over the period of the grant, but it should also have a clear and coherent overarching thematic identity. The subject areas can be related to existing doctoral programmes, but you must demonstrably differ from existing provision.

This guidance document has been designed to support you as you develop your proposal to deliver a Leverhulme Centenary Doctoral Scholarship on behalf of the University.

Funding Opportunity: Highlights

The Leverhulme Trust will fund:

- 18 four-year Leverhulme Centenary Doctoral Scholarships at UK/Home rates
- 6 four-year Leverhulme Centenary Doctoral Scholarships at international/overseas rates
- A master's plus scheme that would allow us to fund up to 6 students to pursue a research masters as well as their PhD. This is specifically for students from low income or Black backgrounds
- Cohort-building activities, with £75,000 is ring-fenced for this over the duration of the award
- Post-doctoral support of up to £400,000 to support graduates from the scheme to transition to academic or non-academic careers
- Administrative support, with up to £225,000 of funding available for the administration of the programme

Further information about the funding opportunity is available on the Leverhulme Trust's website:

- [Centenary Doctoral Scholarships- scheme at a glance](#)
- [Guidance for Applicants](#)
- [Application Help Notes](#)
- [Frequently Asked Questions](#)

We encourage you to familiarise yourself with these documents and the information that the Leverhulme Trust has shared publicly about this funding opportunity.

Application Process and Timeline

**26 September
2025**

Call Information Webinar (online)

To support prospective applicants and Departmental colleagues in understanding this call and applying to the internal selection, the Postgraduate Research Office and the Research Strategy Office are holding an information session via MS Teams.

The session will take place on 26 September at 11:00 and you can [register to attend the session here](#). The joining link will be shared once you have registered to attend.

**23 October
2025**

Internal University Restricted Call Submission Deadline

A university may submit only one application as lead but may partner in multiple applications, provided they are in different disciplinary areas. Therefore, this call will be managed according to the University's [restricted calls policy](#) for both Cambridge-led applications and those where Cambridge would be the non-lead partner.

To take part in the internal selection process, you will have to complete an online form and provide an outline of your proposal. For further details see the information on the [current restricted calls](#) webpage.

**November
2025**

Internal University Selection Process

The outcome of the internal selection process will be announced shortly after the final meeting of the Internal Selection Panel.

**December to
February**

Bid Development and Writing

Support will be made available to the team that has been selected to submit the Cambridge-led application.

6 March 2026

Leverhulme Trust Submission Deadline

The final bid must be submitted to the Leverhulme Trust.

The Leverhulme Trust will publish their decision about the bids that have been awarded funding in July 2026.

Key Considerations

Information shared by the Leverhulme Trust about this funding opportunity and their scheme specific assessment criteria (appended) make it clear that this is a grant to deliver doctoral training, rather than being a research grant with studentships attached. This follows the trends seen in doctoral training funded by UKRI within recent years. Based on experience of supporting training grants, we would advise you to consider the following areas whilst developing your proposal.

Why does this topic need funding?

Your proposal should focus upon a subject area or theme that the University has identified as a research priority. Why is this area a priority? What are the benefits of training researchers to work in this area? Is there an existing skills gap that this training programme could help to address? Is this a key development area within your sector? Essentially, why is this the area where the Leverhulme Trust should put their money and what are the benefits to them, the sector and society more broadly in funding the doctoral training programme that you are proposing?

How will you develop researchers on your programme?

Within this, we would encourage you to think about the following areas:

Developing a cohesive training programme and cohort identity

The Leverhulme Trust has allocated £75,000 for cohort building activities. We encourage you to think about the skills that are required for researchers in your subject area and to use these to develop a plan to develop your cohort.

UKRI published an updated [Statement of Expectations for Doctoral Training](#) in January 2024. Whilst the Leverhulme Trust is not a signatory of this, other key funders in this area are. Within this document, UKRI mandates that doctoral training should cover in-depth subject area knowledge, research and methodological skills; responsible research and innovation, ethics, reproducibility and open research; analytical and data management skills; communication and project management skills; interdisciplinary working; public engagement skills; and routes to impact, including commercialization and entrepreneurship. These may be areas that you wish to consider when designing the training programme that your students would follow.

The relationship with existing doctoral training provision

Applications will be assessed by the Leverhulme Trust based on how well your proposal fits within the University's current doctoral training provision and the extent to which receiving this award could add value.

All doctoral students can access the University's [Researcher Development Programme](#) and are expected to work closely with their supervisors to manage their personal

development. There is, however, an expectation within this funding opportunity that students will participate in a dedicated and bespoke programme of doctoral training. We encourage you to speak to colleagues within Schools about the training currently on offer locally and ways that your proposed programme may fit into this.

Student support and monitoring progress

Within Cambridge, all students can access strong support via their College Tutorial System and the University's [Wellbeing Services](#). When thinking about student support, we therefore encourage you to consider the programme-specific support that you might be able to offer, as well as how you would select, train and support the supervisors working with Leverhulme Centenary Doctoral Scholars.

Several of our UKRI-funded doctoral training programmes now employ a Training and Inclusive Support Manager, which has been well-received. This post-holder meets their students regularly, supporting them to identify training needs and manage their personal development. As the Leverhulme Trust are offering funding towards administrative costs associated with the grant, this may be something that you wish to consider. We encourage you to speak to your School(s) about existing practice and what can be learnt from it.

How will you create a welcoming, inclusive and positive research culture?

Funding previously awarded by the Leverhulme Trust suggests that they share UKRI's commitment to using its funding to promote good practice in this area. The inclusion of the Master's Plus Doctoral Scholarships within this opportunity shows that the Leverhulme Trust is a good example of this.

We strongly encourage you to consider the ways that you can create a welcoming, inclusive and positive research culture as you develop your proposal. The Postgraduate Research Office has created a document to support thinking about Widening Participation and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion within doctoral training programmes which is available on our [SharePoint site](#). Whilst written for UKRI-funded programmes, it should still be helpful in shaping your thinking in this area.

What could the legacy of this programme be?

Within the published information about this funding opportunity, the Leverhulme Trust is clear that it expects these scholarships to deliver a legacy for the University's research in your proposed area that can be sustained. This is something that we strongly encourage you to think about as you develop your proposal.

Top Tips

Work as a team to develop your proposal

Whilst ultimate responsibility for preparing and submitting the final bid will sit with a principal applicant, experience has shown that the strongest bids are developed in collaboration. Within this funding opportunity, the Leverhulme Trust are keen to promote interdisciplinary research so this will be particularly important. As you develop your plans for this training grant, we would encourage you to involve relevant staff within the School(s) who would be involved with the programme you design. This could involve Directors of Postgraduate Education, as well as those involved in delivering and administering doctoral training currently within your research area.

Engage with your School early

There is a wealth of knowledge and experience within the Schools and experience has shown that their involvement is crucial for the development of successful bids for funding. We encourage you to speak to colleagues within the School(s) who would be involved in delivering your proposed programme as early as possible. They will be able to advise on local initiatives to widen participation, the training and support that could be made available to Leverhulme Centenary Doctoral Scholars and the feasibility of proposed programme structures.

Learn from existing practice

The University delivers a number of high-quality doctoral training programmes across a range of subject areas. Whilst the Leverhulme Trust is clear in its communications that this funding opportunity should not replicate existing provision, we encourage you to speak to colleagues and learn from existing good practice.

Think about Equality, Diversity and Inclusion within your programme

Whilst not explicitly mentioned within the information about this funding opportunity, experience has shown that this is a key element of successful bids for funds to deliver doctoral training. We encourage you to consider whether there are areas of underrepresentation within your subject area and ways that the programme that you are proposing could possibly address these.

Within the Master's Plus Doctoral Scholarships, the Leverhulme Trust is specifically looking to support students from Black backgrounds and from low-income household backgrounds. We encourage you to think about how you will attract and support such students as you develop your proposal.

UKRI has published a set of [‘Good Practice Principles in Recruitment and Training at Doctoral Level.’](#) Whilst a different funder, this provides an indication of sector-

recognised good practice and is a short and easily accessible document that introduces key areas to consider.

The guidance shared by the Postgraduate Research Office about thinking about Widening Participation and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion within doctoral training programmes can help to guide your thinking in this area.

Next Steps: Participate in the University Internal Selection Process

A university may submit only one application as lead but may partner in multiple applications, provided they are in different disciplinary areas. Therefore, this call will be managed according to the University's [restricted calls policy](#) for both Cambridge-led applications and those where Cambridge would be the non-lead partner. For prospective Cambridge-led applications the internal selection process may include a second stage in the form of an interview to take place on in November 2025 (date TBD).

Further information about the internal selection process can be found on the University's the [current restricted calls](#) webpage.

The deadline to complete the online form required to participate in the internal selection process is the **23 October 2025**.

Helpful Resources

The Postgraduate Research Office (PGRO) has a suite of supportive resources on its SharePoint site. Due to the way that SharePoint permissions are managed, we would be grateful if you could [request permission to access the site](#) as a whole before accessing the individual links shared below.

[PGRO SharePoint Site](#)

[PGRO Support Pages for Funded Doctoral Training Programmes](#)

[Information about Widening Participation and EDI within doctoral training programmes](#)

[Historic Doctoral Admissions Data \(helpful for identifying areas of underrepresentation\)](#)

Questions?

If you have any questions about the University's internal selection process, please contact researchstrategy@admin.cam.ac.uk.

For questions about best practice around funded-doctoral training programmes, please contact emma.paulus@admin.cam.ac.uk and alistair.swiffen@admin.cam.ac.uk within the Postgraduate Research Office for advice.

Appendix:

What the Leverhulme Trust is looking for

Application Form

As part of the final application to the Leverhulme Trust, a 250-word summary of each of the following topics will need to be provided:

- The rationale behind the choice of research subject area for doctoral scholarships
- The relationship between the proposed Leverhulme Doctoral Scholarship and any current doctoral training awards in the chosen subject area or related disciplines
- How the proposed Leverhulme Doctoral Scholarships would provide added value in the chosen research subject area and to the university/universities
- How the doctoral scholars would be supervised, and the plans for training and cohort-building activities
- The legacy that will be delivered for the university/universities' research in the chosen research subject area and details of how the university/universities intend(s) to sustain this beyond the duration of the Leverhulme grant
- Details of additional financial or other support or resources provided during the grant

As you develop your proposal for the internal selection process, we encourage you to bear this in mind and ensure that you have thought about the answers to the questions above.

In addition to the detail included in the short application form listed above, the successful team will also have to submit a detailed programme description, along a supporting statement from the University a partner institution (if applicable) to the Leverhulme Trust.

Assessment Criteria

The Leverhulme Trust has said that the scheme-specific criteria below will be used to assess applications from single institutions to deliver the Leverhulme Centenary Doctoral Scholarships:

1. The strength of the case made by the university for the choice of subject area identified as a priority for doctoral training. E.g.
 - Does the chosen subject area support a research priority identified in the university's strategic plan?
 - Does it contribute to an existing area of research excellence? Or will it enable the university to innovate in a new field of research?

2. How well the proposed scholarships fit within the university's current provision for doctoral training, and the extent to which the award would add value.
3. The quality of the proposed plans for the supervision of doctoral scholars, including the arrangements for selecting supervisors and monitoring student progress.
4. The quality and appropriateness of the proposed training and cohort-building activities.
5. The extent to which the scholarships will deliver a legacy for the university's research in the chosen area, and how well this legacy will be sustained beyond the duration of a Leverhulme Doctoral Scholarships grant.

Where applications are submitted by a consortia, the way in which the Universities will work together and the strength of the plans to manage the programme across the institutions will also be assessed by the Leverhulme Trust.

We have used this to inform the guidance that we offer within this document.

Awards previously funded by the Leverhulme Trust

A list of the Doctoral Studentship Awards that the Leverhulme Trust has previously funded within the last four rounds can be found [here](#).

Whilst the University has not received funding from the Leverhulme Trust to deliver doctoral training in the past, we are confident that the support and resources are in place to allow for the submission of a strong and competitive bid for this funding.