



## Northern Bridge Doctoral Training Partnership (NBDTP) Studentship Competition 2016: Applicant Guidance Notes

### 1. Introduction

**1:1.** The Northern Bridge Doctoral Training Partnership (NBDTP) runs a single, integrated annual studentship competition to recruit and select postgraduate students of the very highest calibre to study at Newcastle University, Durham University and Queen's University Belfast. The competition is open to all students who meet the AHRC's eligibility criteria, and the award of studentships is based solely on the quality of applicants and their proposed research.

**1:2.** This document provides guidance to applicants regarding the NBDTP doctoral studentships competition. All applicants are expected to follow the guidance, which is outlined in the following sections:

1. Introduction
2. Available Awards
3. How Applicants Apply
4. Stage One: Online Application
5. Stage Two: Nomination of Candidates  
(including optional provision of a URL to a portfolio of outputs for specified Practice-based areas only)
6. Assessment Criteria
7. Selection Arrangements and Making Awards

Appendix 1: Key Milestones and Deadlines

Appendix 2: Frequently Asked Questions.

Appendix 3: Marking Scheme and Assessment Criteria

Appendix 4: Template Email to Send to Referees

Appendix 5: Further Information

### 2. Available Awards

**2:1.** The duration of doctoral studentships is three years for full-time and six years for part-time award-holders though students may apply to extend their period of funded study in order to pursue an approved research training programme or to undertake a placement. All applicants must have at least eighteen months of full-time or three years part-time study remaining. Part-time students cannot also work full time. Where necessary, before awards are made, NBDTP will consult with the successful applicant and their proposed supervisors to ensure that they comply with AHRC's terms and conditions for award-holders.

**2:2.** For students classified as 'Home' students under AHRC rules, awards provide successful applicants with full tuition fees and a maintenance grant set at AHRC's national rate. Students classified as 'EU' under AHRC rules receive tuition fees only. All students have access to a Research Training Support Grant administered centrally by the NBDTP.

**2:3.** Across the NBDTP approximately 50 doctoral awards are available in the 2016 competition.



**2:4.** AHRC-funded doctoral studentships are available in the subject areas listed below. In addition, the NBDTP welcomes applicants with interdisciplinary research interests:

<u>Panel</u>	<u>Subject</u>
A	History (including Historical Geography)
A	Law and Legal Studies*
A	Philosophy
A	Political Science and International Studies (Diplomacy and International Relations)*
A	Theology, Divinity and Religion
B	Visual Arts, encompassing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The History, Theory and Practice of Fine Art (including painting, sculpture, and printmaking)</li> <li>○ The History, Theory and Practice of Digital Arts</li> <li>○ The History, Theory and Practice of Photography</li> <li>○ Art Theory and Aesthetics</li> <li>○ Community Art</li> <li>○ The History, Theory and Practice of Installation Art, Sound Art, and Film-/Time-Based Art</li> <li>○ Architecture History, Theory and Practice</li> </ul>
B	Creative Writing
B	Film History, Theory and Criticism
B	Music
B	Ethnography and Anthropology*
B	Drama and Theatre Studies
C	Museum Studies
C	Cultural Geography*
C	Cultural Studies
C	Archaeology
C	Classics
D	English Language and Literature
D	French Studies
D	Hispanic, Portuguese and Latin American Studies
D	Interpreting and Translation
D	Linguistics
D	Russian, Slavonic and Eastern European Studies
D	German Studies (including Dutch and Yiddish)
D	Italian Studies
D	Media and Communication Studies*

\*PhD research in these subject areas is also funded by the ESRC. Information on Subjects where the AHRC and the ESRC share interests and responsibilities is available in the AHRC's Research Funding Guide, Version 2.8 (May 2015), pp. 94-5.

### **3. How Applicants Apply**

**3:1.** Applicants apply to only one of the three universities in Northern Bridge and if their application is successful this will be their host institution and will hold their registration.



Northern Bridge is also committed to supporting students who are jointly supervised by academic staff from more than one institution in the Doctoral Training Partnership. Where a successful candidate is supported by a supervisory team that crosses institutional boundaries the main and second supervisors should be at the host institution, with the third supervisor from another institution. In certain, exceptional cases it may be appropriate for there to be a fourth supervisor from another institution as well.

**3:2.** There are two stages in the application process:

Stage One: Online Application

Stage Two: Nomination Form

#### **4. Stage One: Online Application**

**4:1.** In Stage One of the application process, applicants wishing to apply for a studentship must complete their chosen University's online postgraduate application form and submit all other supporting documentation by **5:00pm, Monday 11 January 2016**. All applicants must include the code **AH16** on their application form so that it can be identified. Applicants to Queen's University Belfast should tick 'I will apply separately to an external body' then enter **AH16** under 'To which body do you intend to apply?' Applicants to Newcastle University should quote **AH16** under 'Studentship/Partnership Reference' and 'Who is your sponsor/funding body?' Applicants to Durham University should insert **AH16** where asked on the form 'How do you intend to finance your tuition fees' and 'living expenses?' Applicants who are already registered on a programme of doctoral study at Newcastle, Durham or Queen's University Belfast should contact their School and administrative support staff as soon as possible and before Monday 11 January 2016 to indicate they wish to be considered for nomination. Please note that to be eligible for a Northern Bridge studentship, candidates must have completed no more than 18 months full-time or 36 months part-time study on the award start-date.

**4:2.** Candidates need to attach the following additional paperwork:

- a) Current CV (2 sides of A4 maximum)
- b) Research Proposal, no longer than 750 words in length (excluding bibliography)  
Please see the following section for further information.
- c) Contact details of two referees
- d) Transcripts of previous qualifications.

**4:3.** All applicants applying for a studentship award need to include within the relevant section of the online application form a summary of the research project they plan to conduct. The proposal should not exceed 750 words in length and must set out the following:

- The research questions or problems that the research will address.
- The research context, i.e. the past and current research and scholarship in the field.
- Bearing in mind the research context, the contribution to knowledge and understanding the project will make to the field, and a clear statement of the intellectual significance of the proposed research.
- The approach / methodology that will be employed, and an explanation of why it is the most appropriate approach for addressing the research questions/problems.



- The resources and facilities that will be used during the research project, where are they located, and how will they be accessed.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to consult the relevant Subject Area Contact at the earliest opportunity, so that they can identify potential supervisors and ensure that they are fully supported throughout the process.

**4:4.** Stage One of the application process is to be completed by the applicant. It is vital in the first instance for applicants to contact the relevant Subject Area Contact - see <http://www.northernbridge.ac.uk/studentships/contacts/>. The Subject Area Contact will confirm whether the expertise and capacity to supervise the proposed project is available.

**4:5.** Once they have been given the go-ahead to apply by Subject Area Contacts, applicants are responsible for contacting their referees at the earliest opportunity using the email template supplied in Appendix 4 below.

## **5. Stage Two: Nomination of Candidates**

**5:1.** In Stage Two of the application process, subject areas **select applicants** to nominate to the NBDTP. Your School / Department will notify you as to whether or not your application has been selected to proceed to Stage Two.

**5:2.** If you are selected to progress to Stage Two, you are encouraged to write to your referees at the earliest opportunity, using the email template provided in Appendix 4.

**5:3.** Section A of the Nomination Form must be completed by the applicant (please note that a bibliography should not accompany the Research Proposal in Section 1 of the Nomination Form).

**\*\*IMPORTANT\*\* -- please read before completing Section A:**

The following statement is taken from the AHRC website, and sets out the AHRC's definition of research. ***In order for your project to be eligible for funding by Northern Bridge***, it ***must*** articulate 1) a set of research questions, issues or problems; 2) the research context (i.e. the current state of research within your subject area or discipline, and the significance of your own project in relation to that context); and 3) the methods you plan to use in order to answer the research questions.

*“The AHRC’s definition of research is as follows: research activities should primarily be concerned with research processes, rather than outputs. This definition is built around three key features and your proposal must fully address all of these in order to be considered eligible for support:*

*1: It must define a series of research questions, issues or problems that will be addressed in the course of the research. It must also define its aims and objectives in terms of seeking to enhance knowledge and understanding relating to the questions, issues or problems to be addressed.*

*2: It must specify a research context for the questions, issues or problems to be addressed. You must specify why it is important that these particular questions, issues or problems should be addressed; what other research is being or has been conducted in this area; and*



*what particular contribution this project will make to the advancement of creativity, insights, knowledge and understanding in this area.*

*3: It must specify the research methods for addressing and answering the research questions, issues or problems. You must state how, in the course of the research project, you will seek to answer the questions, address the issues or solve the problems. You should also explain the rationale for your chosen research methods and why you think they provide the most appropriate means by which to address the research questions, issues or problems.*

*Our primary concern is to ensure that the research we fund addresses clearly-articulated research questions, issues or problems, set in a clear context of other research in that area, and using appropriate research methods and/or approaches.”*

Source:

<http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/funding/research/researchfundingguide/definitionofresearch/>

The 100-word summary of your proposal should be written in such a way as to be accessible to an academic reader who may not, however, be a subject specialist.

In section 6.2, please explain how your past qualifications and/ or professional experience have equipped you with the research skills and knowledge base that will allow you to undertake your proposed research project. Please also explain why your project is particularly suited to the Northern Bridge DTP. In answering this question, you may wish to consider the expertise of your supervisors, the resources available within the Northern Bridge universities, specific training provision, and the relevance of the Strategic Partners.

**5.4.** Section B, on supervision, training and development and research environment, is to be completed by the subject area / Department / School and, of course, references will be supplied by the referees. Proposed supervisors and other Department / School staff may provide guidance to assist the applicant but Section A must be the applicant's work.

**5.5.** Applicants nominated to the practice-based areas listed below **only may** supply a URL in Section 7 to a portfolio of outputs which may be accessed by assessors **for contextual information only**; this will not form part of the formal assessment documentation:

- Fine Art Practice (including painting, sculpture and printmaking)
- Digital Arts Practice
- Photography Practice
- Community Art Practice
- Installation Art, Sound Art, and Time-Based Art Practice
- Architecture Practice
- Creative Writing
- Music composition and performance
- Drama Practice
- Curatorial Practice

**5.5.** Applicants are strongly encouraged to consider the placement opportunities available through the Northern Bridge Strategic Partners [<http://www.northernbridge.ac.uk/partners/>], and to indicate in Section 8 of the Nomination Form if they have already established with their supervisory team that their studentship will include a placement or placements with either a Strategic Partner or another non-HEI partner.



**5:6.** The Nomination stage of the process will be co-ordinated by subject areas within Schools / Departments, **who will set their own deadlines for the completion of the two sections of the Nomination Form and the receipt of references.**

**5:7.** Applicants are responsible for ensuring that they forward the completed Section A of the form to their School / Department in time to enable staff in subject areas to complete Section B. Schools / Departments are responsible for submitting the Nomination Form to the Institutional Contact in their university by **5:00pm, Monday 15 February 2016.** No Nomination Forms or supporting documentation will be accepted after the deadline.

## **6. Criteria of assessment**

**6:1.** Applications and Nominations for Northern Bridge studentships will be assessed strictly according to the following criteria:

- The quality of the applicant, including their past academic performance, likely future performance, and their preparedness for doctoral study in terms of relevant research skills and experience.
- The quality of the research proposal, including the clarity and cogency of the research questions, awareness of relevant research in the field, the sources to be used, and the appropriateness of the proposed approach / methodology.
- The coherence, importance, and viability of the proposed research, and in particular the feasibility of completion within three years.
- The fit of the supervisory team, including supervisors' subject expertise in relation to the proposed research, past success in supervising students, and any involvement in postgraduate training. In identifying supervisory teams, applicants and supervisors should consider the full spectrum of expertise available across the Consortium.
- A detailed account of how the specific training and development needs of the applicant will be met.
- Quality of the research environment across the Consortium, in terms of School/ Departmental research strengths, interdisciplinary research groups, clusters, Centres, Institutes, and external partnerships, as well as the ways in which the applicant will be integrated into this environment.

The Marking Scheme and Assessment Criteria used by Scrutiny Panels are provided in Appendix 3.

**6:2.** The Studentship Committee includes representatives from across the AHRC's four subject panels. It is thus essential that proposals should be written so as to be accessible to highly experienced but non-specialist academic readers.

## **7. Selection Arrangements and Notification of Outcome**

**7:1.** The Nomination Forms will be assessed, in the first instance, by Scrutiny Panels in Newcastle University, Durham University and Queen's University Belfast.

**7:2.** Following moderation by the Academic Directors, the nominations will be passed on to a Studentship Committee. This Committee will confirm the final rankings from which the awards will be made and identify a list of reserve applicants.

**7:3.** The outcome of the Studentship Competition will be communicated to applicants on **Tuesday 22 March 2016.**



## Appendix 1 Key Milestones and Deadlines

Monday 5 October	Competition launched
<i>Applicants make their initial approach to the appropriate Subject Area contacts</i>	
Monday 11 January	Deadline for the submission of postgraduate application forms
<i>Subject areas work with their strongest applicants to complete the Nomination Form</i>	
<b><i>NOTE: Schools / Departments will set their own deadlines for the completion of the two sections of the Nomination Form and the receipt of references</i></b>	
Monday 15 February, 5:00pm	Deadline for the submission of Nomination Forms to Northern Bridge
Tuesday 16 February	Nomination Forms made available to Scrutiny Panels
Monday 29 February, 5:00pm	Deadline for the submission of Scrutiny Panel scores and comments to Northern Bridge
<i>Results collated and made available to the Northern Bridge Directors</i>	
Monday 7 and Tuesday 8 March	Moderation by the Northern Bridge Academic Directors
<i>Results collated and made available to members of the Studentship Committee</i>	
Friday 18 March	Meeting of the Northern Bridge Studentship Committee
Tuesday 22 March	Results announced
<i>Offer letters issued to successful candidates</i>	
Friday 8 April	Deadline for successful applicants to accept their studentship offer





## Appendix 2: Frequently Asked Questions

**1. Who can apply to the NBDTP?**

Eligibility criteria are set out in the Conditions of Research Council Training Grants, available at:

<http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/rcuk-prod/assets/documents/documents/TermsConditionsTrainingGrants.pdf>

**2. Your University guidance asks for a research proposal of 2,000 words, yet your documentation asks for 750 words. How long does my research proposal need to be?**

Your research proposal submitted via the University online application and incorporated within your Nomination Form needs to be 750 words. Proposals that exceed this word-count will be disadvantaged.

**3. Can I submit documents after the deadlines?**

No documents will be accepted after the deadlines.

**4. In other applications I have submitted a personal statement. Can I attach a personal statement to my NBDTP application?**

No personal statements, covering letters or additional information will be accepted.

**5. One of my referees is not available for a few months due to international fieldwork. What should I do?**

It is your responsibility to ensure that your referees are in a position to respond to our reference request quickly. Please contact them using the email template provided in Appendix 4 before submitting your application to ensure that they are in a position to supply a reference no later than Friday 12 February 2016. Applications which are not accompanied by two references will be disadvantaged, and may not be considered within the competition.

**6. Where can I get a copy of the nomination form to complete?**

Successful applicants who are to be nominated by their subject area to Stage Two of the application process are able to obtain nomination forms through their School or Department.

**7. When should I contact a potential supervisor?**

It is in your interest to contact a potential supervisor as quickly as possible. It is our experience that stronger applications tend to come from applicants who begin these discussions as early in the competition as possible.

**8. I have already applied to your University and now want to be considered for the competition. What can I do?**

Where an applicant has already submitted their application and failed to enter that they wish to be considered for funding, they must notify their prospective department of their interest as quickly as possible.



**9. What qualifications do I need?**

Competition for NBDTP studentships is intense, and we require evidence of academic excellence at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, as well as evidence that the student has sufficient research skills to undertake the project. This generally means a first-class or good upper-second undergraduate degree and performance at or near distinction level in a masters degree. In exceptional cases, candidates with lower qualifications may be considered if they can demonstrate that relevant professional practice or work experience has equipped them with equivalent academic and research skills.

**10. I am already in the first year of my PhD. Can I be considered for an award?**

Yes. Applicants who are already in the first year of their doctoral studies at Newcastle, Durham or Queen's University Belfast should contact their School and administrative support staff as soon as possible and before Monday 11 January 2016 to indicate they wish to be considered for nomination.

**11. Will the data I provide be protected?**

All the information you provide as part of your application will be handled in the strictest confidence and in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998. Your data will be used for the sole purpose of processing and assessing your application for an AHRC Northern Bridge Studentship. During the course of the competition you should be aware that an electronic copy of your nomination form, CV, references and transcripts will be made available online via a shared service hosted by one of the consortium institutions, to be viewed only by internally-approved Northern Bridge Administrators, Academic Directors, Scrutiny Panel members, and members of the Studentships Committee. Your application will be removed at the close of the competition.



## Appendix 3: Marking Scheme and Assessment Criteria

### Marking Scheme for the Applicant

Grade	Descriptor
12	An outstanding applicant: full evidence is provided of exceptional past academic achievement and potential to undertake original independent research, and excellent preparedness for doctoral study. To be funded as a matter of utmost priority.
11	
10	A very strong candidate: excellence is fully evidenced in terms of academic achievement and potential, and a very high level of preparedness for doctoral study. To be funded as a matter of priority, though does not merit the highest priority rating.
9	
8	A strong applicant, with evidence of very good past academic performance and potential, and a high level of preparedness for doctoral study. Deserving of consideration for funding.
7	
6	A solid applicant: evidence of good past academic achievement and potential is provided, and the candidate is reasonably well prepared for doctoral study. But in the highly competitive context of the Northern Bridge competition not possible to be considered for funding.
5	
4	An applicant with some strengths but about whom there are reservations concerning past academic achievements, potential for original independent research, or preparedness for doctoral study. Not recommended for funding.
3	
2	An applicant who falls significantly short of the expected standards in one or more areas. Not suitable for funding.
1	

### Marking Scheme for the Research Proposal

Grade	Descriptor
12	An outstanding research proposal. Research questions/ problems are clear and cogent, and the proposal demonstrates a comprehensive awareness of the research context and of the contribution that the research will make to the field, as well as a compelling case for its intellectual importance. The methodology is appropriate, and the research is thoroughly feasible within the period of supervised study. Any ethical/ safety issues have been identified and appropriately addressed. To be funded as a matter of the highest priority.
11	
10	A very strong proposal. Research questions are clear and cogent, the applicant has a keen awareness of the research context and a sense of the contribution that the research will make, and makes a very strong case for its intellectual importance. The methodology is appropriate, and the research is likely to be feasible within the period of supervised study. Any ethical/ safety
9	



	issues have been identified and appropriately addressed. To be funded as a matter of priority, but does not merit the highest priority rating.
8	A strong proposal: research questions are clear, and the applicant demonstrates awareness of the research context, the contribution that the proposed research will make, and makes a strong case for its intellectual importance. The research is probably feasible within the period of supervised study. Any ethical/ safety issues have been identified and appropriately addressed. Worthy of consideration for funding.
7	
6	A solid proposal: research questions are identified, and the proposal demonstrates some awareness of the research context, and the contribution the research will make. There is some awareness of its intellectual importance. The research may be feasible within the period of supervised study, and ethical/ safety issues have been identified. In the competitive context of the Northern Bridge competition not possible to be considered for funding.
5	
4	A proposal with some strong aspects, but with weaknesses in one or more of the following areas: research questions/ problems, awareness of research context, contribution to the discipline, intellectual significance, methodology, feasibility, or ethical/ safety considerations. Not recommended for funding.
3	
2	A proposal with serious shortcomings in one or more areas. Not suitable for funding.
1	

### Marking Scheme for Supervision

Grade	Descriptor
6	An outstandingly close fit between supervisory expertise and the proposed project. There is also evidence that the full range of supervisory expertise available across the Consortium has been appropriately considered. To be funded as a matter of the highest priority.
5	A very strong fit between supervisory expertise and the proposed project and an attempt has been made to consider supervisory expertise across the Consortium. To be funded as a priority, though does not merit the highest priority rating.
4	A strong supervisory fit and a sense that an attempt has been made to consider supervisory expertise across the Consortium. Worthy of consideration for funding.
3	A good supervisory fit, and evidence that cross-Consortium supervisory expertise has been addressed, but cursorily. In the competitive context of the Northern Bridge competition, not possible to be considered for funding.
2	Supervisory arrangements that have some strengths, but with weaknesses in fit between the project and expertise of the supervisory team and evidence that cross-Consortium opportunities have been considered. Not appropriate for funding.
1	Significant shortcomings in one or more areas; not suitable for funding.



### Marking Scheme for Training and Research Environment

Grade	Descriptor
6	Compelling evidence that the student will be well integrated into appropriate research groups/ clusters/ Centres/ Institutes, and a clear sense that his/her training and development needs have been fully considered. To be funded as a matter of the highest priority.
5	Evidence that the student will be integrated into appropriate research groups/ clusters/ Centres/ Institutes. Most of the student's training and development needs have been considered. To be funded as a priority, though does not merit the highest priority rating.
4	A sense that the student will be integrated into appropriate research groups/ clusters/ Centres/ Institutes. Some of the student's training and development needs have been considered. Worthy of consideration for funding.
3	Evidence that there are research groups/ clusters/ Centres/ Institutes into which the student may be integrated. Training needs have been addressed, but cursorily. In the competitive context of the Northern Bridge competition, not possible to be considered for funding.
2	A research environment that has some strengths, but with weaknesses in respect of; school/ departmental research strengths and/or interdisciplinary infrastructure. Insufficient attention given to research training needs. Not appropriate for funding.
1	Significant shortcomings in one or more areas; not suitable for funding.



## Appendix 4 Email Template to Send to Referees

Applicants are responsible for making contact with their prospective referees at the earliest opportunity, and ensuring that they are available to provide references during the application and selection period. It is also important that references explicitly address applicants' suitability for doctoral research. The following is a suggested email that applicants can amend as appropriate and use when contacting referees.

Dear xxxx

I am applying for a PhD at Newcastle University/ Durham University/ Queen's University Belfast, and for PhD funding from the AHRC-funded Northern Bridge Doctoral Training Partnership ([www.northernbridge.ac.uk](http://www.northernbridge.ac.uk)).

I am writing to ask if I might name you as one of my nominated referees. References will be required by Friday 12 February 2016 at the latest, and may be requested earlier. If you are available to write a reference, Northern Bridge have indicated that their assessors would find it very helpful if you could address the following in your reference:

- Details about how long you have known me and in what capacity.
- Comments on my academic performance to date, and/or on my performance in any post or position of responsibility.
- Comments on my predicted master's result, including information on individual modules where relevant.
- My preparedness for doctoral research, including research skills, and the likelihood of timely completion of my project.

With many thanks in advance for your help,

Yours sincerely



## Appendix 5 Further Information

### Further Information:

NBDTP website: [www.northernbridge.ac.uk](http://www.northernbridge.ac.uk)

AHRC website: [www.ahrc.ac.uk](http://www.ahrc.ac.uk)

Newcastle University website: [www.ncl.ac.uk](http://www.ncl.ac.uk)

Durham University website: [www.durham.ac.uk](http://www.durham.ac.uk)

Queen's University Belfast website: [www.qub.ac.uk/icrh](http://www.qub.ac.uk/icrh)

### Institutional Contact Information

#### Newcastle University

<b>Contact</b>	Sarah Rylance
<b>Email</b>	<a href="mailto:sarah.rylance@ncl.ac.uk">sarah.rylance@ncl.ac.uk</a>
<b>Call</b>	0191 208 6190

#### Durham University

<b>Contact</b>	Jen Gadouleau
<b>Email</b>	<a href="mailto:northernbridge.admin@dur.ac.uk">northernbridge.admin@dur.ac.uk</a>
<b>Call</b>	0191 3342927

#### Queen's University Belfast

<b>Contact</b>	<i>To Be Confirmed</i>
<b>Email</b>	
<b>Call</b>	