

Applicant information for Royal Holloway PhD Social Purpose Studentship

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Deadlines

Deadline for PhD applications: 20 October 2026

Interviews for shortlisted applicants: 20 October to 03 November 2026 (dates will vary by department)

Decisions letters to applicants: 6 November 2026

Start date: 11 January 2027

Where to apply

New applicants

- Apply directly through the [Royal Holloway Applicant Portal](#).
- Please also complete the 'Getting to know our applicants' form. We aim to understand more about our applicants to monitor the diversity of those applying for our funded studentship. This information is collected under the legal basis of legitimate interests to support our equality, diversity, and inclusion initiatives. Data will be held securely and not form part of your assessed application.

Applicants currently registered as a PhD student at Royal Holloway

If you are a current unfunded PhD student in your first year (e.g. started September/October 2026), you are eligible to apply for this studentship opportunity, apply using MS Forms [here](#).

- Please also complete the 'Getting to know our applicants' form. We aim to understand more about our applicants to monitor the diversity of those applying for our funded studentship. This information is collected under the legal basis of legitimate interests to support our equality, diversity, and inclusion initiatives. Data will be held securely and not form part of your assessed application.

Background

To be a forward-thinking University of Social Purpose, we have a commitment to enabling and building best practices of outstanding educational and student experience; research and innovation; and local and global engagement with partners. We look to drive social change, development of policies, business practices for a better, more inclusive future.

We have developed and established these PhD studentships as part of our commitment to being a University of Social Purpose. We are investing in developing the diverse skills and experiences needed for future leaders across the field of research and innovation.

Funding information

Funding is 3.5 years duration (full-time equivalent), covers home MPhil/PhD fees and a UKRI-rate stipend (£23,805 for 2026/27, including London Allowance). Applicants must be eligible for UK home fees. **We are unable to accept applications from overseas students for this funding.**

What does a PhD of Social Purpose look like?

Successful applicants will join a cohort of postgraduate researchers (PGRs) from across the University as part of our Royal Holloway Social Purpose Centre for Doctoral Training. Each PGR will be working on a PhD Project that is designed with social purpose in mind.

For your applications this may be demonstrated: 1) within your chosen research topic, or 2) through joining a project where supervisors have developed an industry partnership, that will have innovation and skills growth as part of our wider social purpose, or 3) a combination of both.

- Where addressing the social purpose as part of your research plans, we take a broad and inclusive approach to identifying Social Purpose across all our areas of strength in the University, but applicants must demonstrate a clear connection between their proposed research, a key social challenge, and potential beneficiaries of the project. In brief: **it will be important to understand the ‘Why’ we must do this work, whether it be to drive innovation, support commitment to sustainability, address a mental health crisis, address inequalities, etc.**
- Where addressing social purpose through a supervisor-led project, where an industry partnership is co-funding the studentship, you will apply to a specific project. **It will be important that the collaborative project has capacity to drive regional/national skills and innovation and growth; this will be addressed within the supervisor statement.**

Importantly, we also see the design of the PGR experience as having a Social Purpose. PGRs will be expected to complete a placement (up to 3 months) or a piece of challenge-led work (e.g. address an issue identified by an external partner), they will engage in multi-disciplinary events developing communication skills, and training to prepare PhD candidates for their future careers, whether that is in academia or beyond. Each PGR will benefit from having a supervision team (minimum 2 Royal Holloway supervisors) to support their PhD journey.

Expectations for the PhD Research Project

- Project proposals must clearly outline how they align to Social Purpose.
- Project must have minimum of 2 Royal Holloway co-supervisors.
- Project must be designed to allow time for: an integrated placement or a piece of challenge-led work (max 3 months), and for submission within the funded period, and engagement with wider University activities (e.g. Doctoral School training, Doctoral School Annual Conference).

Expectations for PGR if awarded this funding

- The PGR is committed to participating in on-campus activities and events, engaging with the PhD programme, which goes beyond focusing and progressing their PhD study, including cohort development activities, and activities that will support their wider development (e.g. researcher training, teaching training, wellbeing, knowledge exchange).
- The PGR must complete a minimum of 10 days of training (development activities) per year, including Social Purpose CDT Cohort training.
- The PGR will complete a placement or a piece of challenge-led work (agreed with their supervisor and the Social Purpose CDT Director) with a maximum period of 3 months.
- The PGR will showcase their wider development activities in the alternative thesis format that allows for inclusion of sections on learning and skills development (see section 14, paragraph (12) (Table1, Format 3) of the PGR Regulations), with an expectation of at least 3 detailed sections that demonstrate learning and skills development.

Supervision team supporting PGRs

If you are successful in being awarded a studentship, to ensure you are supported on your PhD journey, your nominated supervisors will:

- ✓ Have completed the Royal Holloway Supervisor Training module on Moodle that outlines Royal Holloway process, expectations and support available for our PGRs.
- ✓ Have completed Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) training within the last 3 years.
- ✓ Complete, with successful PGRs, a Training Needs Analysis ([see here](#)) within 1 month of you starting.

Completing your application (deadline 20 October 2026)

You will be expected to submit your application using the Royal Holloway applicant portal ([here](#)).

As part of your application, in addition to the information requested, you will be required to submit the following documents (more information on each is below):

- ☐ Personal statement
- ☐ Research project proposal
- ☐ Supervisor letter
- ☐ CV
- ☐ Qualification transcripts

Preparing your personal statement (500 words maximum)

What are we looking for in your personal statement

The panel will be looking to understand your experience and motivation for wanting to do PhD, and in particular, the PhD project you have proposed and your preparedness for completing a PhD.

What to include in your personal statement

You may consider highlighting the following:

- ❖ Why would you like to complete a PhD
- ❖ Why would you like to complete this particular PhD
- ❖ How has your past experience contributed to your decision to do a PhD (what are you bringing to the PhD)
- ❖ What past experience will support you in completing your PhD successfully
- ❖ What do you hope to gain from completing the PhD

Research project proposal (4 pages maximum with minimum font size 11, plus 1 page for references)

What are we looking for in your research project proposal

The panel will be looking to understand your research project plans, how the research aligns with Social Purpose, and that the work is sufficiently thought through that you may complete within 3.5 years.

If you are applying for a studentship where the project is supervisor-led (e.g. developed as collaborative between supervisor and an external organization), you will still be expected to write a proposal that will allow you to demonstrate your understanding of the work, provide greater depth to the research project, timelines, etc. (as requested below).

What to include in your research proposal

You are expected to include the following:

- ❖ **Statement at the top: 'I am applying for a RH PhD Social Purpose studentship' on page 1**
- ❖ Project title
- ❖ Statement on how the project addresses Social Purpose (max 250 words).
- ❖ Project background (e.g., outline key background information to showcase where your project will address a gap in the field, or add to what is known).
- ❖ Aim of your research project
- ❖ Design of your research project and how will support you in addressing your aims
- ❖ Planned timeline for work to be completed; this does not need to be very detailed but should show progression of the work to be completed, including placement, across the 3.5 years
- ❖ Outline supervision team and what each will bring to the project
- ❖ Details on any research funding support that will be required to support your PhD project and/or training, and where these funds will be secured (your supervision team will be able to support you with identifying what research and training funds will be required as well as what opportunities for funding support will be within the department and/or school).
- ❖ Details, if appropriate, of any external partners (charity, organisations) you will be working with as part of this project or for your placement (if already sourced). Note that it is not necessary that you have an external partner, nor that you have an agreed placement arranged at this stage.
- ❖ Outline of ethical considerations (max 250 words).

Supervisor letter (1 page maximum)

What are we looking for in the supervisor letter

The panel will be looking to understand your primary supervisors' assessment of your readiness for doctoral study, the fit between your proposed project and your supervision team (linking to feasibility), and the fit of your proposed project to Royal Holloway's commitments as a University of Social Purpose.

What to include in the supervisor letter

Supervisor letters should include:

- ❖ Details on their assessment of the applicant.
- ❖ Details on how they will support the applicant to be successful in their doctoral studies (e.g., comment on applicant development needs, what each supervisor will contribute to supporting applicant, how the supervisors will work together, any other relevant information to supporting the applicant's success).
- ❖ Reflection on how the proposal demonstrates a clear connection between the research project, a key social challenge, and potential beneficiaries of the project.

Note, if applying for a studentship that is supervisor-led with an industry partner co-funding the studentship, the details of the co-funding arrangement should be included in the supervisor letter.

Preparing your CV

What are we looking for in your CV

The panel will be looking to understand your preparedness to complete a PhD and where you may have development needs.

What to include in your CV

Below are some prompts to help you to think about if you have information to add on different areas to showcase your experience, background and training.

It is not expected (nor necessary) that you will have something to say on all of these.

- Academic qualifications
- Work experience (paid)
- Work experience (unpaid)
- Publications
- Conferences/invited talks
- Awards/Recognitions
- Training and skills

Assessment Criteria

Applications will be assessed on the following three criteria:

1. **Applicant preparedness (40%).** Your application will be assessed to understand how your previous experiences have prepared you for postgraduate study and research. To assess this, we will review past academic achievement(s), CV, Personal statement (contribution of life experience as well as academic and/or professional experience), and supervisor supporting statement.
2. **Quality and feasibility of PhD proposal (40%).** Your application will be assessed on: the ideas presented that underpin the proposal, concept and design of the research, novelty, feasibility of research being completed within the funded time period (with the inclusion of an internship in this period), advancement of work in the current field, potential impact, expertise of supervision team and plans for how they will work together to support the project, feasibility of necessary training, fieldwork, lab work, study trips planned, etc. To assess this, we will review your project proposal, personal statement (reasons for pursuing this project), and supervisor supporting statement.
3. **Project fit with social purpose (20%).** Your application will be assessed on the extent to which aligns to our commitments as a University of Social Purpose. To assess this, we will review your summary statement, research proposal, supervisor supporting statement.