

# AHRC Open Panel Feedback 2024

After the 2024 AHRC DTP Open scholarship review process, academic reviewers were invited to respond to the following questions, giving general feedback to assist applicants for 2025.

## Overall, what attributes did the stronger/ higher-ranked applications show (including in relation to previous years, if it is possible to say)?

- It was evident where applicants had worked closely with supervisor/ supervision team.
- Useful to see evidence of existing partnerships with regard to KE/ Impact, as this shows clear trajectory of engagement.
- Clear articulation of USP/ originality as well as methodologies. Well prepared and viable public engagement plans and strong arguments made within the ISS as to why this team and what the student will bring.
- Persuasive methodological narrative and impressive supervision.
- Clear training plans with properly articulated timelines.
- Where applicants are current doctoral students, the applications show evidence of support from supervision team.
- Applicants did not neglect any aspect of the criteria.
- Projects had a timeliness/ urgency about them.
- Applicants had folded their previous experience into their training plans and needs.
- Clearly identified and articulated gap in research with joined up solution and knowledge exchange/ public engagement/impact plans appropriate to the nature and scope of the project.
- Compelling alignment between project, candidates' aptitude and training needs, supervisory expertise, and institutional context.

## Overall, what did the weaker/ lower-ranked applications show (including in relation to previous years, if it is possible to say)?

- Weaker applications did not show evidence of existing relationships or that they had collaborated closely with supervisors/supervision teams on their applications.
- Applicants sometimes underplay their experience and preparedness, partly as a difficult balance with their training needs.
- ISS did not align with the student application and generic statements included, not focusing on student needs.
- Weaker projects had good questions but not great methodologies.
- Some projects hinging on expensive travel plans.
- Less cross-hei supervision teams.
- Supervisors underestimating the importance of ISS.

- Some training plans are too broad. Preferable to have a year-by-year approach showing bespoke offer.
- Could be stronger on contribution to knowledge.
- Proposals need to be sharper, with clearly laid out research questions, offering step by step methodology.
- Impact plans are vague.
- Choosing supervisors in the same HEI but not the best team.
- Research questions were out of date/ not current.
- Unfeasible training plans.
- Outdated sources included in applications.
- Supervisor fit was not clear, and ISS was not written in clear and specific alignment with application (the weakest simply listing supervisor and institutional achievements with only superficial engagement).
- Training needs were often the weakest section. Lack of clarity what benefits the candidate would gain from university and SGSAH.

### Is there any particular advice you would offer for future applicants, based on this year applications?

- Important for applicants to make a convincing case for support across the range of disciplinary knowledge on a panel.
- Applicants need to explain why certain approaches for knowledge exchange and wider dissemination are proposed, otherwise they feel ‘tacked on.’
- Be clear about originality and communicate clearly to a broad spectrum of reviewers rather than applying specific terminology.
- Project timelines should be clearly laid out for the entire research journey.
- Try not to do too much, some applications had too many training needs.
- Make an effort to communicate to a more general review panel rather than highly specialised.
- Address the criteria.
- Don’t be afraid to approach individual academics at other institutions if you feel there is clear resonance of your research and their interests.
- Set a clear timetable with your supervisors for the proposal writing and engage in the process of revision.
- Be clear about the gap in research that your project aims to fill.
- If you’re applying for a second time, and have already begun your PhD, make sure you collaborate with your supervisors to rewrite the full proposal, taking account of progress so far.
- Advice for supervisors – make sure that the supporting statements are written in support of the project and of the applicants needs to successfully undertake the project.
- Be aware that reviewers don’t see your transcripts so make the case for training needs with reference to prior study where appropriate.