

PhD loans - FAQs

Eligible students

You'll be able to apply for a PhD loan if you are an **UK national**, ordinarily resident in England, beginning a PhD at any UK university in the 2018-19 academic year.

You must also be aged 59 or under and not already hold qualifications at PhD level.

Loans can be combined with funding from your university or other sources, but not with Research Council funding, NHS funding or other direct Government funding.

Can I apply for a loan as an EU student?

The UK Government is considering making **EU students** eligible for the loans. This may depend on the result of the UK's Brexit negotiations.

Why is there an age-limit and how will it work?

The government wants to ensure that those who benefit from the doctoral loans are able to use their skills and training to contribute to the UK economy and that they will earn enough to make repayments. For this reason the loans have an age-cap of 59.

This will be based on a student's age at the beginning of their PhD. Provided you are 59 or under on the first day of the first academic year of your course, you will be eligible.

Can I combine a loan with a full Research Council studentship or a 'fees only' award?

No. You won't be eligible for a doctoral loan if you also receive Research Council funding for your PhD. This applies even if your award is a 'fees only' studentship.

The best option for most students will be to apply for Research Council funding (if available) and consider a PhD loan if they are unsuccessful.

How will my residency be assessed?

Residency will probably be based on an applicant's address history. If you can demonstrate that you have been living in England for at least three years prior to your PhD, you will probably be eligible.

Note that to qualify as 'ordinarily resident', England will need to be your regular home. This usually means you can't simply have been living in the country as a student (on a three-year undergraduate degree, for example). Similar criteria are used for the UK Masters loans.

What if I've moved to England from another part of the UK?

Eligibility is based on citizenship and residency, not your specific 'UK nationality'.

You *can* apply for an English PhD loan if you have previously lived elsewhere in the UK, but you must now be ordinarily resident in England, as above.

Will loans be available in other UK countries?

Yes, eventually. Northern Ireland has made plans for its own PhD loans, but hasn't set a date for these. Wales has suggested introducing up to 150 fully-funded PhD studentships for its own students.

I'm already studying a PhD, can I apply for a loan to complete my doctorate?

Unfortunately not. The Government has now confirmed that PhD loans will **only be available to new students** starting a PhD from the beginning of the 2018-19 academic year.

This means that current students won't be eligible for funding. Nor will students starting a PhD in 2017.

Will I be able to apply for a PhD loan if I already have a Masters loan or an undergraduate loan?

Yes. Other student loans won't affect your eligibility for PhD loans. Repayments for your PhD loan will be combined with those for your Masters loan. Undergraduate debt will remain separate.

Can I apply for a loan if I already have a postgraduate research qualification, such as an MPhil?

Yes, provided it is not a PhD-level (level 8) qualification. A research Masters such as an MRes (Master of Research) or MPhil (Master of Philosophy) will not make you ineligible.

However, you cannot receive a PhD loan to study these courses. Your intended qualification must be a PhD (or other equivalent doctorate).

Eligible courses and subjects

PhD loans will be available for doctorates studied at all universities across the UK. This includes equivalent qualifications such as the DPhil and isn't restricted by subject area.

The only restriction concerns PhDs by publication. These are sometimes awarded to candidates whose existing body of work that makes an original contribution to knowledge sufficient for a PhD. PhD loans are postgraduate student loans and therefore require the borrower to be following an 'active programme of study'.

Will I be able to receive a loan for a DPhil?

Yes. The DPhil is equivalent to a PhD and these programmes are eligible for loans in exactly the same way.

Will I be able to receive a loan for a Professional Doctorate?

Yes. Professional doctorates are also equivalent to PhDs. The only difference is that they use research to make an original contribution to professional practice, rather than academic scholarship. As such, professional doctorates are fully eligible for the upcoming PhD loans.

This covers courses such as the DBA (Doctor of Business Administration) EdD (Doctor of Education) and others.

How can I be sure my doctoral qualification will be eligible for a PhD loan?

A more complete list of appropriate qualifications will probably be released before the loans are launched. In the meantime we know that any qualification at **level 8** of the [Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies](#) should be eligible for a loan.

Will I be able to receive a loan for a PhD offered within a Doctoral Training Partnership or Doctoral Training Centre?

Many UK PhDs are now offered within Doctoral Training Partnerships (DTPs), Doctoral Training Centres (DTCs) or Centres for Doctoral Training (CDTs). These are consortia of universities that collaborate to fund and support PhD research. They normally do so with the support of Research Council funding.

As above, the PhD loans *won't* be available to students with a Research Council studentship. This means that you can't receive a PhD loan if your doctorate is funded within a DTC, DTP or CDT.

However, that doesn't mean you can't use a loan to support yourself as an otherwise self-funding student within one of these university consortia (and benefit from the structured training, shared facilities and ongoing research aims they provide). It's simply that you won't be able to receive a Research Council studentship to do so.

What subjects can I receive a PhD loan to study?

There will be **no restrictions** on subjects, disciplines, research areas or topics.

In practice it is likely that the loans will be of most benefit to students in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. Students in these areas are more likely to manage without full Research Council funding and to self-fund or portfolio fund through different sources.

Students in Science, Technology, Engineering and Medicine (STEM) disciplines tend not to self-fund due to the high cost of equipment and facilities. Instead most PhDs in these areas are offered as specific funded projects within a larger research group.

However, the government is encouraging universities to consider supplementary funding to support students with loans. This could help make loans an attractive option to PhD students in all subjects - including disciplines that traditionally require full-funding in advance.

Will my PhD proposal be taken into account?

No. The decision to offer you a loan won't be based on the nature of the topic you intend to research or the quality of your proposal. However, you will need to have been accepted to study a PhD at a UK university and application materials such as your **research proposal or interview** will be an important part of this process.

Will £25,000 loans be available for research Masters degrees?

No. The £25,000 PhD loans will be intended for doctoral programmes.

What if I am initially registered for an MPhil? Will my PhD programme still be eligible for a loan?

Yes. Many PhD students are initially registered for the MPhil (Master of Philosophy) before being 'upgraded' to PhD candidates after a period of time.

This is normal practice and will not affect your eligibility for a PhD loan.

However, you can't receive a doctoral loan for a standalone MPhil.

What if my PhD programme also awards a Masters degree?

Some PhD courses also include 'integrated' Masters qualifications such as an MRes or an MPhil. This is fine, but the qualification you receive a loan for must be your stated 'exit qualification' and this must be at PhD-level.

As such, you won't be able to apply for a PhD loan to only complete the Masters component of a doctoral programme. Nor will you be able to apply for an additional Masters loan on the basis that your PhD includes Masters-level work and qualifications.

Can I apply for a loan to study a part-time PhD?

Yes, although the current plans do not distinguish between part-time or full-time study. Instead you must state your intended completion time when you apply. This can't be longer than eight years.

How long can my PhD last?

Your PhD must be between three and eight years long. The length of your programme will be assessed based on the intended completion time set by your university.

Where can I study with a PhD loan?

Doctoral loans will be available for students who have been accepted for a PhD at any university in the UK. This includes institutions in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, as well as England.

Will loans be available for PhDs by distance learning?

Probably. The current guidelines don't state how a student will need to be classified in terms of their 'campus' attendance. It is likely that this will not matter: the government recognises that PhD study is very variable and that students carry out their projects in different ways.

However, you will need to be studying your PhD in the UK. Students who are permanently resident in other countries will probably not be eligible, even if they are studying through distance learning at a UK institution.

What if my PhD includes an overseas placement?

It's possible that loans may still be available for PhDs with an overseas placement or for joint-PhDs delivered in partnership with foreign universities.

This would follow the format established for Masters loans. If so, foreign study may be limited to 50% of your programme or less.

Will there be a cap on the number of loans available?

No. The Government's PhD loan consultation had suggested limiting the number of loan-funded PhD students each university can recruit. This proposal has been dropped based on feedback. The PhD loans will now be entirely 'demand led'. This means any student can receive a loan to study at any university, provided other eligibility criteria are met.

Loan amount and repayment

PhD loans will be worth up to £25,000. Repayments will be income-contingent, with salary deductions made at 6% of income over £21,000 per year. Debt and repayments will be combined with your Masters loan (if you have one).

Who will be responsible for administering the loans?

PhD loans will be administered by the Student Loans Company. This is the same process as applies to English undergraduate and Masters loans.

Are the PhD loans means-tested?

No. You will be able to apply for the maximum PhD loan regardless of your financial background.

Will I have to borrow the full £25,000?

No. £25,000 is simply the maximum amount you can borrow with a PhD loan. You will be able to apply for less than this, but you won't be able to borrow any more.

This should allow you to tailor your loan according to your personal circumstances and take account of any other PhD funding you have.

Will I be able to combine a PhD loan with other funding?

This will depend. The intention is for the PhD loans to be 'non-duplicative': as a form of public finance they won't be intended to support students who already receive public funding from other sources.

The main impact of this is that you cannot take out a PhD loan if you receive a studentship from one of the UK Research Councils. This applies to fees-only awards as well as full studentships.

Note that you will still be eligible to apply for [Disabled Students' Allowance](#) (DSA) whilst receiving a PhD loan. You will also be able to receive funding from other 'independent' sources, such as your university, your employer or charities and trusts.

How will repayments work?

You will begin repaying your PhD loan once you have completed your course. Repayments will be income-contingent, deducted from your earnings at 6% of any annual salary over £21,000.

Note that repayments will normally be taken monthly, but will still be based on your overall annual salary.

How will PhD loan repayments work alongside other student loan debt?

Postgraduate loan repayments are intended to be combined. This means that you will repay a single debt amount of up to £35,280 *if* you have both a Masters and a PhD loan.

However, the rate at which you repay will also be adjusted. Instead of making two repayments at 6% you will only make one repayment.

This should help ensure that graduates with undergraduate, Masters and PhD loan debt are not faced with excessive salary deductions. Regardless of how many student loans you have, you should only ever repay a maximum of 15% of your annual income over the threshold.

Will interest be charged on my PhD loan?

Yes, PhD loans will be subject to interest in the same way as other student loans. The rate for this is planned to be RPI (Retail Prices Index) +3%. This rate will be better than an equivalent commercial loan. Interest will begin accruing as soon as your first loan payment is made.

Can repayment terms and interest rates change?

Potentially. The government plans to fix repayment rates until April 2021. Interest rates can change year-on-year, based on the Retail Prices Index (which is a measure of inflation).

Will £25,000 cover the full cost of studying a PhD?

As with the Masters loans, the PhD loans are intended as a general contribution to the costs of postgraduate study. This means that they aren't tied to the specific cost of a doctoral programme or the living costs incurred by PhD students.

In practice, both of these amounts will vary depending on factors such as the fees charged by your institution and the cost of living in your local area.

£25,000 should significantly reduce the financial burden of PhD study, but it won't necessarily cover full fees and living costs for a three year doctorate.

PhD loans in other parts of UK

The PhD loans described so far on this page are planned for English-resident students, applying through Student Finance England. However, the Northern Irish and Welsh Governments are planning to introduce a similar PhD loan system for 2018-19.

These are likely to work similarly to the English loans.

Further information

A consultation on the loans ran from 4th November to 16th December 2016. The Government then published its [response](#) on 8th March 2017. This confirms that the loans will be available in time for the 2018-19 academic year and announces that applications will open in Spring / Summer 2018.

Further details (including clarification of EU eligibility) are expected ahead of the application window.