University of Kent

SEDarc APPLICANT BRIEFING

Prof Joseph Tzanopoulos
SEDarc Academic Lead



Welcoming you today are:



Felicity Clifford – SEDarc Administrative Lead for Kent



Prof Joseph Tzanopoulos – SEDarc Academic Lead for Kent

ESRC SEDarc Funding

- The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) provides funding for new postgraduate students each year through a network of Doctoral Training Partnerships (DTPs).

- Kent is part of the The South East Doctoral Training Arc (SEDarc) ESRC DTP with Royal Holloway, Reading, Surrey, Sussex, and Kingston.

- PhDs embedded in five interdisciplinary, thematic challenges
- Strong focus on digital, data & quantitative skills training for all
- Strong focus on employability (placements, 'Research in Practice' programme)
- Positive action to increase diversity

Kent webpage for SEDarc: www.kent.ac.uk/graduate-researcher-college/ukri-collaborative-studentships/sedarc

Eligible Disciplines

Psychology

Business and Management

Law

Politics and International Relations

Sociology, Social Work and Policy, Criminology

Anthropology and Development Studies

Environmental Studies

Architecture and Planning

Cybersecurity (Social Sciences)

Health and Social Care

PhD Thematic Challenges

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- PhDs must be pitched within one of five social science challenges

Theme	Exemplary challenges
Living Sustainably	Climate change; Net Zero, green & circular economies; biodiversity & conservation; ecosystem services; energy, food & resource security; environmental risks, resilience & justice; environmental understanding, education & behaviour change; group norms; managing population movements linked to environmental change; conservation across age and cultures.
Healthy Thriving Communities	Health & social care; wellbeing; health inequalities; public policy, services & goods; poverty; equality, diversity & inclusion; place, identity & citizenship; voluntarism; transport & mobility; neighbourhood dynamics; housing & homelessness; families, childhood & youth; ageing; schools, education trajectories, & effective interventions; intergroup interactions; migration.
Inclusive Economic Growth	Mechanisms, regulatory frameworks & policies that promote inclusive growth; macro-economic (in)stability; taxation & fiscal policies; global, regional, place-based & demographic inequalities; education & skills; lifelong learning; labour market outcomes; fair work & pay gaps; sustainability & legitimacy of growth strategies; economic decision making.
Secure, Effective, & Trusted Institutions	Shifting geopolitical orders & the role of institutions; future international trade frameworks; operation, effect & legitimacy of democratic institutions; effective legal frameworks & systems for ensuring justice; human rights; forced displacement; modern slavery; peacebuilding & conflict resolution; diversifying leadership.
Transformative Technologies for Society	Societal shaping & outcomes of AI, robotics & VR / immersive media; socio-economic aspects of transformative technologies, including face recognition, computer vision & natural language processing; digital technologies in education, (mental) health, and justice; societal engagements with cybersecurity; fintech & livelihood strategies; technological change & future of work; digital divides and digital inclusion.

Training Programme – what's on offer?

- Standard PhD - 3.5 years or,
- 1 year Masters + 3.5 year PhD
  - The applicant must not have a previous social science Masters
  - Maximum of 4 scholarships awarded across consortium
- Individual research project circa 2.75 years
- 200 hours per year of digital, data skills, and advanced methods training
- 3-month placements for all (flexible delivery)
- New thesis format to assess full range of competencies.

Funding:

- Doctoral Stipend (equivalent to the Research Councils UK National Minimum Doctoral Stipend, currently the 2026/27 rate is £21,805.)
- Tuition fees
- Research Training Support Grant – upon application request

Eligible Masters Programmes at Kent for 1 year Master's+3.5 PhD funding

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MA International Conflict Analysis - Politics & International Relations

MSc Social Research Methos - Social Policy & Sociology

MSc Business Analytics - Business & Management

MSc Psychology (open subdiscipline option) – Psychology

MSc in Conservation Science – Conservation

MSc Marketing - Business & Management

SEDarc Thesis Format (compulsory)

- The PhD thesis is the product that demonstrates competencies acquired from the general & specialist skills training

- The PhD thesis must include:
  (a) A section on project management
  (b) A data management plan
  (c) A chapter on knowledge exchange, perhaps reflecting learning from the placement (e.g policy report, industry solution, accessible science communication)
  (d) Reflections in appropriate chapters as to how the training journey influenced the research
  (e) Archiving of study materials, data, and reproducible analysis code (as appropriate) on a public platform.

Research in Practice

- Prepare students to flourish in a wide range of careers
- Impart core skills e.g. communication, leadership, networking
- Opportunities to apply social science skills in a wide range of contexts
- Broadening experiences
- Research in Practice is a core part of the thesis

Monthly Webinars (compulsory in Year 1)
Building a CV, leadership, positioning, cross-cultural working, work-life balance, career presentations, etc

Specialised Opportunities (Years 2 & 3)
Informed by Development Needs Analysis

Placements (compulsory)
Placements can be non-academic or academic (preferably different institution / discipline); must be 3 months full time equivalent (though can be taken flexibly); SEDarc support to find and manage the placement; support for EDI

Training

It is expected that PGR students graduating from SEDarc universities must be able to demonstrate, through relevant training, practical experience and/or submission of their thesis, that they possess the following knowledge, skills and attributes:

- Conceptual skills
  - These learning outcomes can be achieved and/or demonstrated in a variety of ways, including professional experience, employment, undergraduate education, master's education
- General research skills
  - Delivered across the DTP, at induction event and summer school
- Specialist skills
  - Bespoke for individual research needs
- Research in practice skills (including placement)

The Placement

- The recent ESRC ‘Review of the PhD’ (2021) revealed that it is important for students to develop generic, transferable employability skills in addition to core research skills.
- ESRC expectation is that all students will do a placement and they now provide 3 months of PhD funding + up to £1000 in travel expenses to support this. Student who do not undertake a placement will not get this additional funding
- Total duration of the placements is 3 months (if full-time), and can be spread out to a longer duration for part-time and flexible arrangements.
- Placements partners can be from public, private, or academic sectors. Students are encouraged to source their own placement so that it best serves their career goals.
- Students’ application will need to indicate their potential partners/preferences.

THE SEDARC COMPETITION

Studentship Allocation

- SEDarc has ~39 studentships per year.
- Each institution can nominate up to **18** applications for consideration.
- Only nominated applicants can access the SEDarc portal and will be invited to do so.
- Students must not have already started a PhD.
- ESRC places a cap on international students of 30% and will pay home rates only; institutions will meet the difference.

Studentship Allocation & Evaluation

Interdisciplinary, diverse panel comprising reps from each institution will rank applications. Two reviewers to rate each application (including institutional leads).

Evaluation criteria will be based on four equally weighted criteria:

- **Fit to themes (20%)** - this will be based on how well your research project is fit around one of the five interdisciplinary SEDarc themes.
- **Project quality and feasibility (40%)** - this will be based on your outline of your proposed research project, your reasons for pursuing it, and its wider significance. SEDarc assessors will be looking for evidence of the following: your ability to design and conduct a research project; a coherent and well-thought-out research plan; a strong awareness of the place of the literature in your field; and the potential impact of your research on professional practice. Reference will be made to your personal statement, as contained in your application, as well as your supervisors' supporting statement.
- **Student quality (40%)** - this will be based on your description of how your previous experience (this includes life experience as well as academic and/or professional experience) has prepared you for postgraduate study and research. Reference will be made to your personal statement, as contained in your application, as well as your supervisor's supporting statement.
- **Research Environment** – tick box criterion.

Strategic steers

- Advanced Quantitative Methods
- Advanced Data Skills
- Interdisciplinary contact with other Research Councils

www.sedarc.ac.uk/esrc-steers/

Application process

Deadline: 23:59 GMT, Sunday 22 November 2026



Notes:

- Placements: you do not need to have formal confirmation from a placement provider. Ideas at this stage are welcome.
- Overseas Fieldwork: please be advised that funding is capped at £4,000, with a maximum approval period of 6 months.
- Supervisor: your proposed supervisor will need to complete Section 8 of the application form before you submit.

Key Dates

22 November 2026	• Apply to Kent and submit a Kent/SEDarc application form
23 November – 11 December 2026	• Shortlisted candidates invited to interview at Kent
13 January 2027	• Kent Selection Panel meet to nominate final 18 candidates
29 January 2027	• Final 18 selected candidates submit their SEDarc application
End of March	• SEDarc sends out formal offers to awarded candidates

Supervisor Statement

Applicants should ask their primary supervisors for a supporting statement to attach to their Kent / SEDarc application before the 22 November 2026.

Supervisors will be asked:

- Please comment (in a maximum of 250 words) on how you, as the supervisory team, will work together to support the applicant. In doing so, please reflect on existing or past supervision of other doctoral researchers as a supervisory team; and, any other complementarities you consider to be your strengths as a supervisory team.

- Please comment (in a maximum of 250 words) on the quality and feasibility of your applicant's research proposal. In doing so, please reflect on: the proposal's broader significance in the discipline(s); the positioning of the proposal in the relevant literature; the research plan; and, the potential impact on professional practice. If your applicant's research project plans (a) to use advanced quantitative methods, (b) to use very large datasets and/or big data methods, or (c) involves interdisciplinary collaboration with researchers outside of the social sciences then please highlight and explain this, as your project may qualify for funding under an ESRC strategic steer.

Residential criteria

Open to both UK residents and international (this includes EU nationals) candidates.

To be classed as a "Home" student, applications must meet these UK residential conditions:

- Be a UK National (meeting UKRI residency requirements), or
- Have settled status, or
- Have pre-settled status (meeting residency requirement) or
- Have indefinite leave to remain or enter

If applying as an overseas student (this includes EU nationals), Kent will waive the difference between the Home and Oversea fees. Please be aware that there is a 30% cap on international studentships. This will be applied at the SEDarc selection stage.

UKRI residency requirements:

Further guidance on residential eligibility is provided in Annex B of the UKRI Training Grant Guidance.

Any questions?