

E4 DTP RECRUITMENT PROCEDURE

Please keep this document confidential and do not circulate to applicants or external staff who are not on the supervision team. *The highlighted sections include new items from last year.*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Overview	2
Project Submission.....	2
Supervisors’ eligibility to submit an E4 project	2
Project submission and review	3
Student-led projects	3
Nomination of Candidates by Supervisors.....	4
Pre-nomination Stage for International Applicants.....	4
Nomination Stage	5
Unconscious Bias and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Training	5
Feedback to Non-nominated Students.....	6
The Widening Participation Panel.....	6
Shortlisting of Candidates by DTP Panels	7
Shortlisting panels	7
Shortlisting marking criteria	7
Shortlisting assessment criteria mapping.....	10
The Interview Process	10
Invitation to interview and scheduling	10
The interview panels.....	11
Interview marking criteria	12
Additional considerations	12
Offers and Post-interview Stage	13
Indicative Recruitment Timeline.....	13
Appendix - Template for E4 DTP PhD Interviews.....	15

OVERVIEW

E4 DTP recruitment involves a multi-stage process with the following steps:

1. Potential supervisors/PIs submit their project (1 project or 2 projects if one is CASE) and supervisor information online (mid-October).
2. Projects are reviewed on the basis of our project guidelines.
3. Projects that pass the review stage are advertised (early November).
4. The deadline for any student-led project proposals that may arise is mid-December.
5. The student application deadline is early January.
6. **International applicants must be granted permission to apply by supervisors who must email the E4 admissions team by the same applicant deadline (early January) with up to 2 names of international applicants they want to pre-nominate. Only these 2 applications will be screened by the admission team. The other international applications received will be ignored.**
7. All applications (from all Home candidates and up to 2 pre-nominated International applicants) are screened for eligibility and completeness and forwarded to supervisors. All equality and diversity data is forwarded separately to the E4 Widening Participation panel.
8. **PhD supervisors are allowed to select up to 2 candidates for consideration by shortlisting panels, unless at least one of their students have applied to a CASE studentship in which case they can nominate a third candidate.**
9. The admissions team may inform supervisors they can select a third (or fourth if already at three b/c of CASE) candidate on the basis of widening participation data (see The Widening Participation Panel section below). This information is used to ensure under-represented candidates have maximised chances of being considered for interview by the shortlisting panel.
10. **Supervisors will not get more than one DTP student per year as first supervisor.**
11. The three E4 shortlisting panels meet (Earth and Planetary Science, Ecology/Biology, All other Global Change) and mark candidates (late January/early February).
12. The top ~60 candidates (including a maximum of ~20 international applicants, proportionally to the international students appointment quota of 30%) are invited to interviews, which take place over 3 days in late February. Supervisors will not get more than 2 students interviewed. Further interview marks are awarded.
13. Offers go to the highest ranked candidates in each category: Home and International applicants (late February to early April).

PROJECT SUBMISSION

There are two types of E4 projects: supervisor-led projects, which supervisors design, and student-led projects, which are initiated by the candidate. Both projects need to be submitted to E4 by the first supervisor, ahead of the relevant project submission deadline. The application procedure and selection process are the same for both types of projects after then and candidates are treated equally. See further information on student-led project in the relevant section below.

When supervisors submit an E4 project, they need to adhere to the “E4 project flexibility” policy which states that all E4 supervisor-led projects have flexibility to adjust to a student’s profile, to some extent. The following statement will be visible, by default, on all published E4 projects proposals: *“E4 supervisors are happy to hear from candidates who would wish to adapt the project to their own ideas and research background.”*

SUPERVISORS’ ELIGIBILITY TO SUBMIT AN E4 PROJECT

- E4 supervisors can submit one supervisor-led project per year as first supervisor; two if one of them is a CASE project.

- E4 supervisors can submit one student-led project if they have submitted one supervisor-led project and two student-led projects if they have not submitted any supervisor-led project. When they have already submitted 2 supervisor-led projects (with one being a CASE), they cannot support a student-led project.
- E4 supervisors will not get more than one E4 student per year (as first supervisor and across all project types together)
- E4 supervisors who have been allocated a student in the previous recruitment round are not allowed to submit any project (of any type) as first supervisor for the following recruitment round. They will only be able to submit an E4 project as first supervisor in the year after.
- To be eligible to submit an E4 project, an E4 supervisor must be below the limit number of pre-submission¹ PhD/DTP students that they currently supervise. At the time of project submission, an E4 supervisor can have, as first supervisor:
 - Up to 5 pre-submission PhD students overall (including non-DTP students)
AND / OR
 - Up to 3 pre-submission DTP students overall (across E3 and E4)

The number of pre-submission PhD students should be checked by supervisors who intend to submit projects for the next recruitment round before submitting a project. Projects will not be accepted if one of these limits is reached.

The above measures have been taken in order to ensure both a high quality of supervision for our students and a healthy spread of PhD topics across the whole of NERC's remit within the E4 DTP.

PROJECT SUBMISSION AND REVIEW

Supervisors must submit their project proposal and supervisor information through an [online form](#) by the communicated deadline (usually early October for supervisor-led projects and mid-December for student-led projects). Supervisors can find detailed guidance on the project submission stage on the [administrative section of the E4 DTP website](#) (requires Ease authentication) and the guidance document will also be emailed twice: with the pre-call for project in June and when the call for project is sent out (mid-September).

External supervisors who do not have Ease access (UoE login) will not be able to submit their project through the above link. Instead, the UoE supervisor of the supervision team, even if secondary supervisor, will need to submit the project on their behalf. Please refer to the submission guidance document for assistance.

After submission, projects are reviewed by an E4 panel in a light-touch process, prior to advertising to ensure they are feasible within 3.5 years (minimum funding length), provide a clear outline describing questions that could be undertaken by the applicant in the course of the PhD and that they fall within NERC remit. The reviewing panel members can contact the supervisor if they wish to suggest changes or have any questions. Minor edits such as typos will be made directly without consultation.

STUDENT-LED PROJECTS

Sometimes students, on the basis of their previous research, may have ideas or strengths that are better suited to projects different from the supervisor-led projects which are advertised. They can contact potential supervisors during the lead up to the application deadline and come up with their own research project providing that the supervisor is happy to supervise. Supervisors who are approached must have agreed to act as first supervisor, submit the project according to the E4 process described above and, most importantly, commit to

¹ "Pre-submission PhD students" means students who have not yet submitted their thesis for examination.

support the student during the forthcoming selection process (i.e. they must nominate them). Student-led projects that differ from those advertised will be considered by the E4 reviewing panel under the following conditions:

1. The main supervisor submits a description of the project for approval by the student-led project submission deadline (usually mid-December). **They must tick the “student-led project” box in the online project submission form.** They must inform the E4 DTP Manager of the submission so the proposal can be picked up and sent for review.
2. Any candidate proposed through this route will count as one of the two allowed nominees (3 if one is for a CASE project) and enters the process for shortlisting in exactly the same way as candidates applying for an advertised project.
3. All candidates will be considered on the stated shortlisting criteria and therefore there is no benefit or disadvantage to candidates applying or being nominated through this route.

Student-led projects, once approved, are not advertised, to prevent other candidates to apply for them and to comply with Intellectual Property policies. **It is essential that the E4 administrative team knows straight from the project submission stage if a project is student-led so that they can make sure the project is NOT advertised.**

Details of the student-led project submission process can be found on our E4 DTP Student-led Project Submission guidance document which is available to download from the following webpage: [E4 DTP Projects | The University of Edinburgh](#).

NOMINATION OF CANDIDATES BY SUPERVISORS

RECRUITMENT CAP FOR INTERNATIONAL APPLICANTS

International students are eligible to apply for an UKRI-funded studentship however, DTPs can only recruit international students up to 30% of their overall students' number. In E4, this represents a maximum of 7 students for cohorts of around 24 students per year. In 2020/21, E4 received 413 applications from international candidates and appointed 7 international students which represents a success rate of 1.7%. Following that recruitment round, a pre-nomination stage for international applicants had been set up in 2021/22 and 2022/23 to alleviate the workload of the E4 admission team and to manage expectations of both applicants and supervisors.

For the 2023/24 recruitment cycle, thanks to the set up by the GeoSciences IT team of a new online application portal which has been designed to reduce the workload of the E4 DTP admission team, E4 is able to remove this pre-nomination stage for international applicants. All applicants, Home or International, are now able to apply directly via the same application portal until the same application deadline. Supervisors will be able to access their applications online as they are submitted before deciding on which applicants they wish to nominate (see “Nomination stage”).

However, the NERC cap on our recruitment of international applicants still stands and it is important to ensure that expectations from both supervisors and applicants are managed. In particular, both should be aware that in order to comply with this cap in the best way, E4 has to issue invitations to interview in proportion. This means that E4 usually invites to interview about 20-25 International students versus 40-45 Home students.

We will also continue to strongly advise all applicants (Home and International) to get in touch with their prospective supervisors to discuss applying to their project before putting in a formal application.

NOMINATION STAGE

In 2023/24, a new online portal for applicants allows candidates to upload their application material online directly rather than sending them via email to the E4 DTP team. The application portal is linked to the project database which means that supervisors will be able to see the applications they have received from the project database, as they come in. This also includes the references which will be uploaded by the referees on the same portal. Guidance for supervisors to access their applications is available separately ([administrative section of the E4 DTP website](#) - requires Ease authentication).

Supervisors are free to get in touch with their applicants should they wish to ask more information or arrange a chat to help with their nomination decision.

The E4 admission team will still screen applications as quickly as they can to confirm the fees status of the applicants and flag out any incomplete applications but supervisors are encouraged to check out and review their applications, regularly before the application deadline and as soon as possible after the application deadline, to best anticipate their nomination decision.

Once the application deadline is passed (and as soon as possible after then), the supervisors are sent a list of their applicants (both Home and International applicants). They must select up to two preferred candidates (regardless of the number of projects advertised or applications received). **If one of the selected students has applied to a CASE studentship, the supervisor may select a third student for consideration by the shortlisting panel.**

The Widening Participation Panel or the DTP manager may also approach supervisors to identify when an additional candidate may be proposed. If so, the E4 DTP admissions team gets in touch with the supervisor after they nominated their preferred students and offer them a third nomination among a set list of candidates.

Supervisors do not need to provide a supporting statement when nominating their chosen applicants (these will not be passed onto the shortlisting panels).

Supervisors should read the [selection criteria](#) below to maximise their chances of obtaining an exceptional PhD student.

If supervisors have to consider a candidate with qualifications from a country where they are unfamiliar with the grading system, they can find guidance on this link: <https://www.grb.uk.com/recruiter-research/international-degree-equivalents>.

UNCONSCIOUS BIAS AND EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION TRAINING

All supervisors are expected to undertake Unconscious Bias and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion training prior to the advertisement of their project and/or candidate selection.

UNCONSCIOUS BIAS TRAINING

UoE staff and external staff with an Ease account and Learn access will have access to the UoE online training course [Challenging Unconscious Bias](#) (through Learn – Self Enrol). In addition, they can also refer to the below resources.

External supervisors can either attend courses at their own institution if provided or read/view the below resources:

1. Read the [Royal Society briefing on unconscious bias](#) (4 pages):
2. Watch the [Royal Society animation introducing key concepts of unconscious bias](#) (3 min.)

3. Take [two Implicit Association Tests](#) on an annual basis from the following options (c. 10 min. each): Gender-Science, GenderCareer, Disability, Sexuality, Skin-tone, Religion, Weight and Age.

It will be required that supervisors confirm completion of unconscious bias training in writing when they email back to put forward their preferred candidates.

References from supervisors who are part of the supervision team of the project applied for are not accepted.

EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION TRAINING

UoE staff and external staff with an Ease account and Learn access will have access to the UoE online training course [Equality and Diversity Essentials](#). (through Learn – Self Enrol tab at the top right and then ‘Browse Course Catalogue’).

Non-UoE staff can attend their own institution’s training on Equality and Diversity or contact us if they don’t have access to such training.

FEEDBACK TO NON-NOMINATED STUDENTS

Non-nominated candidates are notified by the DTP admission team as soon as possible and within 2 weeks via their applicant portal. Supervisors can check on the applicant portal when the rejection message has been sent.

At that stage, supervisors will be responsible for providing feedback to applicants they have not nominated. Unsuccessful applicants who would like feedback on their application will therefore be told to email the project supervisor directly.

THE WIDENING PARTICIPATION PANEL

E4 is committed to increasing and promoting the diversity of its applicant pools and recruited cohorts. Therefore E4 has created a Widening Participation Panel in order to ensure equality of opportunity to all E4 applicants.

This panel is completely independent from the E4 selection panels and the information that applicants disclose is confidentially looked at by our Widening Participation Panel only. This mechanism allows students to feel confident to share widening participation information knowing this will not be detrimental to their selection chances. Given supervisors are limited in the number of students they can put forward, supervisors may be given the opportunity to put forward additional competitive candidates if the WP panel have assessed they meet the relevant criteria. Running the WP panel in our 2020/21 recruitment round has shown that it has helped increasing opportunities for students from under-represented groups to reach the interview stage where they have the opportunity to demonstrate their potential as well as the offer stage, leading to a more diverse and representative cohort. We hope that the WP can continue and develop through further practise.

The Widening Participation Panel is actioned as follows:

- 1 Applicants are given the opportunity to complete a Widening Participation Form when submitting their application, where they can disclose any bias they think they have been facing during their studies.
- 2 This Widening Participation Form is NOT forwarded to supervisors. It is seen by the E4 admission team who records it and then forwards it to the Widening Participation Panel.
- 3 After the supervisors have nominated up to 2 applicants (or 3 if one student is for a CASE project), the Widening Participation Panel and the E4 admission team look at the widening participation data to consider which applicants have been selected and which have not. Supervisors may be approached and asked to consider if any of their remaining WP applicants would be a suitable candidate for the proposed project. If yes, the supervisor can nominate an additional candidate to progress to the shortlisting stage.

- 4 All applications are passed on to the E4 shortlisting panels (without the widening participation information).
- 5 After the E4 shortlisting panels have ranked applications according to the selection criteria described below, the Widening Participation Panel looks at the rankings of all applicants who have included relevant WP information. They may recommend candidates who scored highly, i.e. who are clearly capable of undertaking a PhD, but who may lie below the usual cut off, for an invitation to interview.
- 6 The interview stage will proceed as normal. The widening participation information will not be disclosed to the interview panels.
- 7 After the final ranking is known, the Widening Participation panel looks at WP candidates who are within the appointable window. Where candidates are ranked equally or when they ranked close to the offer cut off, the WP panel might recommend making offers to improve representation of underrepresented groups, as identified through the Widening Participation forms submitted by candidates.

SHORTLISTING OF CANDIDATES BY DTP PANELS

The eligible candidates' written applications are passed on to the E4 DTP shortlisting panel for scoring. The E4 DTP has three thematic panels, which cover broadly Earth and Planetary Science, Global Change, and Ecology and Biology.

SHORTLISTING PANELS

Panels review all candidates selected by supervisors and the Widening Participation panel and give scores based on applicants' full application (application form, CV, transcripts and references). Shortlisting panels do not see the EDI information or the Widening Participation form that applicants can submit with their application. Each candidate is marked independently by three members of a same shortlisting panel.

The three current E4 DTP panels cover broadly Earth and Planetary Science, Global Change, and Ecology and Biology, but panel chairs will select panels that can evaluate candidates and projects that do not fit exactly into these categories. The shortlisting panels selected by the panel chair comprise 4-6 members, who will encompass at least two partner institutions and consist of a mix of career stage, gender and other diversity criteria where known wherever possible. Each panel member will be asked to complete an Equality and Diversity Form in order for the DTP to monitor the EDI criteria and gender balance of panels. All panel members are required to have taken unconscious bias training as described above. Prior to student ranking, all panel members are reminded to be aware of unconscious bias when reviewing applications.

Shortlisting Panel Members must not review applicant(s) where they form part of the advisory team either as first or secondary supervisor and must flag these cases to the Panel Chair as necessary.

Members of the panel should independently score each candidate and send this data to the panel chair. The panel chair works out the average score for each candidate and communicates final marks to the E4 DTP Manager. The E4 DTP Director looks at final scores from each panel and moderates marks if necessary.

The application scores do not change after the shortlisting panel (i.e. they are not influenced by interviews).

SHORTLISTING MARKING CRITERIA

The marks for the shortlisting panel are out of 45. 30 additional marks are related to the interviews. Thus final selection is based on a mark out of 75, with an extra 10 marks available for additional considerations (these include added weighting for CASE studentships and projects supervised by Early Career Researchers including NERC fellows or when student scores are tied to address widening access and participation).

Please note these are for guidance and panel members are expected to use their professional experience to consider extensive pertinent experience or innovative career moves within this framework. Because we want to consider a diverse cohort of students, we will consider MSc, integrated masters and professional experience as equivalent. Panels need to use references with caution (e.g. the top % might not constitute clear evidence of research ability).

IMPORTANT NOTE - The evaluation system below has been put in place to enable consistency across different shortlisting panels for different subject areas across the DTP. However, these marks are to guide panels and are not formulaic. We do not want to raise either false hopes or discourage students based on these criteria. For that reason, please keep this document confidential: under no circumstances should the marking criteria be shared with students. The marks are for shortlisting panels' use only and we will not communicate scores to individuals (supervisors or students).

The panel members will not have access to widening participation data but are all fully trained in unconscious bias and asked to consider evidence of ability to conduct a PhD going forward as opposed to relevant opportunities to which there may have been differential access in the past.

The ranking scale of initial applications (written applications) is split in 5 categories:

1. Academic ability,
2. Scientific skills,
3. Management, communication skills and citizenship,
4. Scientific statement,
5. References.

These scores are intended to be guidelines since not all candidates will fit cleanly into these categories. Variation between reviewers and disciplines are moderated at the shortlisting panels level and across panels by the E4 DTP Director, to ensure consistency in the range of marks. These final marks are only shared by the shortlisting and interview panels to protect student confidentiality. General feedback can be provided but marks will not be released.

ACADEMIC ABILITY (OUT OF 10)

For candidates with qualifications from a foreign country, panel members can find guidance at this link:

<https://www.grb.uk.com/recruiter-research/international-degree-equivalents>.

To assess this criterion, panels should look at transcripts and focus on individual marks rather than the overall grade obtained for the degree.

- | | |
|-----------|--|
| 10 | Several sources of evidence of completely outstanding capability, e.g., all marks above 80s in undergraduate and postgraduate, or equivalent professional experience. Dissertation marks 80 or above. Rarely seen. |
| 9 | Several sources of evidence of completely outstanding capability, e.g., majority of marks above 80s in undergraduate and postgraduate, or equivalent professional experience. Dissertation marks 80 or above. Rarely seen. |
| 8 | Outstanding capability in undergraduate e.g., majority of marks above 80 including dissertation mark but less evidence of consistent performance over multiple sources of information than 9. |
| 7 | Several sources of evidence of completely outstanding capability, e.g., 70s and 80s in undergraduate and postgraduate or equivalent professional experience. Dissertation marks 70 or above. |
| 6 | Outstanding capability in undergraduate, e.g., in 70s - 80s including dissertation mark but less evidence of consistent performance over multiple sources of information. |

- 5 Very good marks overall but some weaker marks dipping down below 70 though may have compensated in later marks, e.g., at MSc or via professional experience. However, the panel should be aware of grade inflation over recent years so lower marks historically with very good professional experience can move candidates to a higher grade.
- 4 Mix of marks in 60s and 70s (i.e., borderline first) or pass at MSc.
- 3 Mid 2.1 with marks in 60s across the board
- 2 Marks 60s – 70s but some lower than 60.
- 1 Mostly 2.2 marks (50s) with only one or two higher

SCIENTIFIC SKILLS (OUT OF 10)

These can be gained academic and non-academic activities and include field skills, lab skills, coding and analytical skills or other skills related to the scientific research to be conducted.

- 10 Has already demonstrated all the skills required in the PhD, perhaps through professional experience (may apply to some very highly skilled applicants who may be finding they need a PhD to progress in other sectors or who wish for more academic freedom to pursue own research goals – very rare)
- 9 Clear evidence of developing new methods or skills (laboratory, field, analytical, numerical). In other words, evidence that they have innovated rather than adopted existing methods.
- 8 Advanced skills in the PhD area substantially higher than might be gained through degree program alone, e.g. trained bird ringer, professional coding experience, lab management skills.
- 7 Advanced skills in area relevant to PhD or evidence of adaptability if highly ranked on only some parts of required skill set.
- 6 Relevant scientific skills from undergraduate degree training for the PhD or evidence of adaptability and speed to learn new skills.
- 5 Skills not completely aligned but evidence of adaptability, speed and willingness to learn new skills.
- 4 Skills not completely aligned but some relevant to project and key skills will be taught.
- 3 Skills not completely aligned and may need considerable support to learn skills required
- 2 No relevant skills and would need full support to learn all.
- 1 Concerns that there is too big a gap to learn required skills

MANAGEMENT, COMMUNICATION SKILLS AND CITIZENSHIP (OUT OF 10)

These can be gained through academic and non-academic activities – non-academic examples might include managing work while studying, organising student activities, working to promote a cause or charity, fundraising initiatives, etc.

- 10 Extensive evidence of a high ability to self-start, manage large projects and communicate to a diverse range of stakeholders through multiple platforms in multiple setting, either academic or non-academic (very rare).
- 9 Evidence of ability to manage large projects or networks, self-start, organise activities and communicate beyond immediate peer groups
- 8 Evidence of ability to manage time, organise activities and communicate through different platforms outside immediate undergraduate programme.
- 7 Evidence of ability to manage time around undergraduate activities while balancing other pressures.
- 6 Evidence of managing time and communicating well across undergraduate activities.
- 5 No evidence over and above completed degree
- 4 Minor concerns about ability to organise time without mitigating circumstances.
- 3 Some concerns
- 2 Serious concerns
- 1 Considered unlikely to be able to complete PhD

SCIENTIFIC STATEMENT (OUT OF 10)

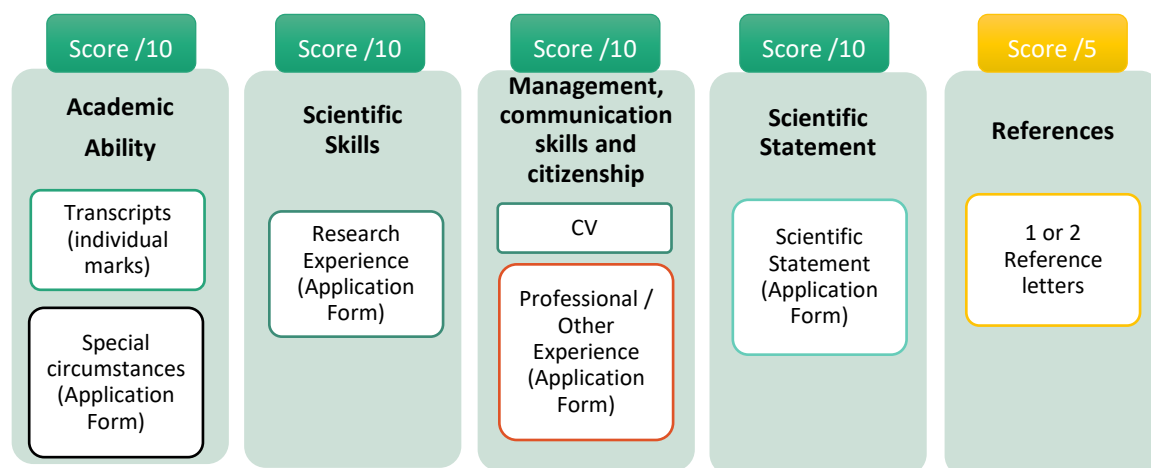
10	Excellent statement showing a real understanding of the knowledge gaps and research area expressed in a scientifically rigorous manner. Contains novel insights and points of view.
9	Excellent statement showing a real understanding of the knowledge gaps and research area expressed in a scientifically rigorous manner.
8	Excellent statement describing all aspects in a scientific manner.
7	Very good – scientifically strong in general.
6	Some aspects very well described but some weaker areas
5	Good statement but less focused or less relevant information
4	Statement lacking coherent argument on why the PhD is relevant and of interest
3	Some warning signs in statement showing lack of full understanding
2	Weak statement with incorrect assumptions
1	Very poor statement with no logical thread

REFERENCES (OUT OF 5)

5	Excellent - best ever student and proactive in driving own ideas / top of year and showing insight, ability, problem solving and passion for subject above expected
4	Very good – Within the top group of the year and clearly excellent ability and enthusiasm
3	Good – clear thinker and abilities to do a great PhD
2	Might need a lot of support to do what's required for a PhD
1	Some concerns or warning signs

SHORTLISTING ASSESSMENT CRITERIA MAPPING

The below chart explains, for each of the assessment criteria, which elements of the application panels should refer to, in order to score each criteria using the above scale.



THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

INVITATION TO INTERVIEW AND SCHEDULING

Following the shortlisting scores and recommendation by the Widening Participation panel, the DTP Manager will invite between 60 and 70 applicants to interview. Interviews are held over a 3-day period in late February. Invitations to interview are sent early February with the main supervisor copied in. Given the high number of interviews concentrated in a limited time, it is not possible to take into account supervisors' availability to schedule their candidate's interview.

Attendance of a supervisor to the interview (either in person or online) must be a student-led decision: supervisors are asked to discuss this with their applicant, in advance of the interview, and only attend if the applicant requests them to do so. We would normally limit supervisor attendance to one supervisor (primary or secondary).

When members of the supervisory team attend the interview (either in person or online), they attend as observers only: they are not allowed to speak and must leave the interview room at the same time of the candidate at the end of the interview. Support of an applicant is implicit and does not require any confirmation from the supervisors. However, following the interview and if the supervisory team wishes to withdraw their support to their applicant, they should immediately email the E4 DTP Manager and state the reason for their decision.

Each interview slot is 30 minutes. Ideally, 20 minutes are dedicated to the actual interview, with 5 minutes for questions from the candidate, and a 5-minute turnover period where panel members discuss marks. The number of candidates and workload associated with organising these panels means that we cannot offer longer interviews.

Candidates (and their supervisor) who are invited for interview receive guidance on what they should prepare for and what to expect (for both online and in-person interviews).

International candidates will be shortlisted and invited to interview proportionally to the cap of studentships that E4 is allowed to allocate to international students and set by NERC (30% of the finally recruited students number). For example, for a cohort of 23 students, no more than 7 international students can be appointed.

Supervisors will not have more than 2 applicants interviewed. If more than two applicants fall into the interview window and have equal or close shortlisting scores, supervisors will be asked which candidate they prefer to be invited for interview.

THE INTERVIEW PANELS

Each interview panel should be made up of at least 3 people. The panels should be mixed gender and career stage unless there are exceptional circumstances. They do not need to be experts in the PhD topic on the panel but there should be at least one panel member in the same broad discipline. Panel chairs should attempt to minimise panel turnover to maximise marking consistency. Any member of an interview panel should conduct at least 3 interviews to calibrate marks. The DTP Director will also fill in interview slots to ensure consistency across panels.

Interview panel members must flag out in advance to their panel chair when they are part of an interviewees' prospective supervision team as necessary so that a replacement panel member can be called in.

Prior to interview, all panel members will be reminded to be aware of unconscious bias when interviewing. Panels will ask the same questions to all candidates and use open ended questions which give candidates the opportunity to expand on the question topic to explain their strengths in that area. The interview panel will ask questions from a template, which is attached as an appendix.

INTERVIEW MARKING CRITERIA

At the bottom of the template are boxes for scores. The first box (“Shortlisting Mark”) is determined at the shortlisting stage (see above) and is not modified during the interview.

There are three criteria in the mark sheets for the interviews, each out of 10:

1. **Description of previous research** including clear communication of questions, methodologies and results showing appropriate scientific depth and problem-solving ability
2. **Description of proposed research** including rationale for project, understanding of what's required and the knowledge gap it will fill
3. **Wider issues discussed** - overall scientific depth, command of the subjects and clarity in discussing across the board

Members of interview panels should stay for at least 3 interviews to calibrate marks and from year to year we try to retain common panel members to minimise fluctuations in the marks. The panels should **agree** on a final mark for each category, via consensus (i.e. not average marks across panel members). To give a rough idea of marks:

10	Superb. At the end of interview, you feel like offering the candidate a lectureship. Such a mark should only go to exceptional students.
9	Outstanding. Similar to a 10. A rare mark.
8	Excellent. Very impressive in interview. Virtually no weaknesses. You wish the interview lasted an hour.
7	Very good. Virtually no weaknesses but perhaps some answers that were not as impressive.
6	Good performance. Questions answered well. A few more dubious answers than a 7 but overall a competitive candidate.
5	Able to answer questions but nothing inspiring.
4	Some good answers but mixed in with dubious answers.
3	Many dubious answers.
2	Clearly not able to do a PhD
1	Unable to answer any questions.

Panels are asked to provide some feedback notes at the bottom of the interview sheet (or on a spreadsheet if online) so that feedback can be provided to unsuccessful applicants if requested. Feedback requests will be directed to the panel chairs or DTP Director.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

There is also an allowance for some “balancing factors” when final scores are equal between candidates. The following additional factors will be considered at the DTP Director’s discretion:

1. **CASE studentships:** E4 needs to hit the NERC target of 25% of the studentships to be CASE projects so E4 must have the flexibility to raise CASE students into the funding frame if necessary.
2. **Early Career Researchers:** E4 encourages ECR staff so if an ECR who has not yet had a PhD student has a candidate with a similar score to a senior academic, the candidate of the ECR may be favoured.
3. **Widening Participation:** if students obtain a similar ranking, candidates from under-represented categories may be considered.

OFFERS AND POST-INTERVIEW STAGE

Offers are issued in the days following the interviews. First supervisors are copied into the offer email.

After the first batch of offers is sent, students on the reserve list are emailed and kept updated regularly. The full process can take up to 2 months until all offers are accepted. Non appointable students are notified within 2 weeks of the interviews. Feedback to applicants is provided by the panel chairs at this stage.

First supervisors are copied in all communication to their candidate(s) so that they are kept updated with the offer process progress and the outcome of the interviews.

A supervisor will not get more than one DTP student per year.

If a supervisor has had two candidates interviewed and if they have a preferred one, they may, after the interviews have taken place, email the DTP manager to let them know. This does not override other considerations that have to be taken into account at offer stage, such as the final ranking, the cap on international student numbers, the CASE quota or the Widening Participation and EDI representation.

INDICATIVE RECRUITMENT TIMELINE

Please see the current year Recruitment Schedule with all the current year dates on our administration webpage.

E4 DTP Partner Meet-up:	Mid-May
Pre-call for projects sent:	Mid-June
Call for supervisor-led projects proposals sent:	Mid-September
Supervisor-led projects proposals submission by:	Mid-October
Supervisor-led projects advertised online from:	Early November
Student-led projects submission by:	Mid-December
Candidate applications' deadline: Pre-nomination of max 2 international candidates by supervisors by:	Early January
Applications reviewed and sent to supervisors by:	Mid-January
Shortlisting of max 2 candidates by supervisors by:	End of January
Shortlisting of selected candidates for interview by E4 panels by:	Early February
Invitations to interview sent by:	Early February
Interviews:	End of February
Offers sent out to students from:	Late February to Mid-April
Universal NERC DTP acceptance of offers date (before which candidates are not obliged to accept any PhD offer):	3 rd Wednesday of March

APPENDIX - TEMPLATE FOR E4 DTP PHD INTERVIEWS

Please select from the questions below, and if adding additional questions make sure that all the candidates are asked the same/similar questions to help ensure fairness and comparability across candidates. Ask OPEN questions to encourage the candidate to talk, then PROBE and INVESTIGATE incomplete answers or generalisations. There is unlikely to be time to ask the questions in brackets in a typical 20/25-minute NERC E4 DTP interview.

Introduction

Welcome to Edinburgh and School; introduce Panel; identify project applied for; **stress that both written application and performance at interview will be considered in the final ranking.**

Suggested wording: "Our final decision will take account of marks from the shortlisting panel for CVs and references, so does not rest solely on this interview. The shortlisting process was extremely competitive, so you have already done very well to reach this stage".

A- Degree(s)

What attracted you to your degree(s)?	(Can you give examples of working under pressure or to deadlines?)
What were the key courses that interested you and why?	(Do you have experience of working individually and as a member of a team? Which is preferable to you and why?)
Why would you now like to do a PhD?	

B- Past Project(s) / Future Project

What did you do for your honours/Masters project?	What attracted you to this project?
What was the key finding of your project(s)?	What is the first question you will ask and what techniques might you use to address it?
If starting your project again, what aspects would you change?	
What skills did you learn that would be useful for the PhD?	What knowledge gap does the project address?
Did you have to deal with any difficult situations or problems and how did you solve these?	What do you consider to be the essential qualities to study for a PhD?

C- Wider Issues (adapt according to project & candidate background)

Why is PhD project research area important?	(What do you consider to be the future for this area of science?)
---	---

What are the big/exciting issues in the discipline at present?	(How should university research/industry/public interact?)
Are there new topics/skills which you feel you may need to learn for this project?	

D- General

Do you have any questions to ask us?

Conclusion

Thank the student; **Say we will start sending offers as soon as all the interviews are over but the whole process might take until mid-April; NERC Offer Acceptance Deadline is <third Wednesday of March>March 202X, 12pm.**

Suggested wording: "If you receive an offer of a PhD from us or any other DTP, you are not required to formally accept before the universal deadline of <above date> unless you wish to do so. While we are waiting for responses, it is possible that you will not hear from us until after <above date>."

SCORES

Please complete the white cells with the panels' scores from interview and notes for feedback. For more information on scoring interviews, please refer to the E4 DTP Recruitment Procedure document (page 8 – 'The Interview Process').

Shortlisting Mark	INTERVIEW SCORES			Balancing Factors	TOTAL SCORE
	1. Previous Research	2. Future Research	3. Wider Discussion		
45	10	10	10		75
<i>From written application, scored by the shortlisting panels.</i>				<i>Carried by DTP management with all data from all panels.</i>	
Notes for feedback <i>A few words - If the applicant requests feedback on the interview, the panel chair will use these notes.</i>					