



Centre for National Training and Research Excellence in Understanding Behaviour (Centre-UB)

PhD Project Application Process 2026 cohort

The Centre for National Training and Research Excellence in Understanding Behaviour ([Centre-UB](#)) is an ESRC-funded centre for doctoral training that provides a training environment characterised by excellent science, cutting edge methods, interdisciplinarity, and translation through our critical mass of world-leading and internationally excellent research conducted by our behavioural researchers. Co-production of human behaviour-related research and impact as well as co-delivery of training is a key part of Centre-UB with partner organisations hosting PhD students for research-in-practice placements, hosting fellows and acting as co-supervisors. Partner organisations will also provide training to Centre-UB supervisors, fellows and doctoral researchers, and will host outreach events with a focus on human behaviour.

Aims and Objectives: The aims are to a) produce well-rounded doctoral researchers with expertise in behavioural research who are ready to take up leadership-track positions in academia, industry, policy and wider professional communities; and b) promote a positive research culture and a commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) through specific training and good practice. Engagement with stakeholders, experts-by-experience and the public is embedded throughout.

Doctoral researchers will be provided with training tailored to their needs and expertise. Training is split into the following sections

- **specialist training**, that includes in-depth subject/disciplinary methodological and theoretical training, and training and support in generating, accessing, and analysing data that supports data driven research applicable to human behaviour;
- **conceptual training**, to ensure that doctoral researchers understand the breadth of social science methods, and to support them to make: (i) informed choices about their research design; and (ii) engage critically with research outside of their immediate discipline;
- **core**, to equip doctoral researchers with research skills required for postgraduate study and for their future career, within academia and/or beyond, e.g. project/data management, ethics, referencing, impact;
- **'research in practice' training**, to develop doctoral researchers' transferable skills and to provide practical opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge and methodological skills in different contexts and during placements;
- **cohort-building opportunities**, to empower doctoral researchers to develop peer support networks and engage in on-going learning, during and beyond the studentship.

PhD Research Project

Centre-UB behavioural research innovation and excellence is focused on three broad, multidisciplinary pillar themes spanned by one cross-cutting theme to recognise that, while behaviour can be studied at the level of the individual, all behaviour, exists within the context of multiple systems:

Pillar Theme 1: Digital harms and goods,

*Pillar Theme 2: Equity in physical and mental wellbeing,
Pillar Theme 3: Environmental change and sustainability, and
Cross cutting theme: Systems thinking.*

Key to Centre-UB is that subject matter expertise is not siloed within individual research disciplines; instead, doctoral researchers will work within and across these themes with colleagues from other disciplines. Interdisciplinary PhD projects are highly encouraged, but the majority of the research project should be within social sciences. Each Centre-UB project should also fit within the [ESRC remit](#).

All 4-year studentships will be collaborative with a partner organisation, who will contribute to the aims and design of the research, provide data access (if relevant), and/or assist with dissemination activities. Partner organisations can be public, private, or third sector partners, with interest and expertise in human behaviour. Each doctoral researcher will have 2 supervisors based at the University of Birmingham, and a supervisor based with the partner organisation. The contribution of the partner organisation to the project, including the arrangements related to the placement and/or access to data, as well as expected academic outputs and partner-related outcomes will need to be included in the project application form.

Supervisor expectations and eligibility

- Support the PhD project as outlined in the project application.
- Support the development of the doctoral researcher.
- Attend Centre-UB supervisor training delivered by the Centre-UB team, where all procedures related to Centre-UB will be explained, including the expectations of the supervisory team.
- Deliver a masterclass (together with the partner organisation) and host a webinar.
- Experience in supervising a doctoral researcher to successful completion. Less experienced academics can apply, but must include a supervisor with experience as primary supervisor in their project application.
- Academic supervisors can be from different schools within UoB, which can facilitate interdisciplinary research.
- Academic supervisors who are the primary supervisor in the 2025 cohort are not eligible to be the primary supervisor for a studentship in the 2026 cohort.

Partner organisation expectations and eligibility

- Support the PhD project as outlined in the project application.
- Provide appropriate access to facilities and data to support the PhD project.
- Attend Centre-UB supervisor training delivered by the Centre-UB team, where all procedures related to Centre-UB will be explained, including the expectations of the supervisory team.
- Deliver a masterclass (together with the academic supervisor) and host a webinar.
- Financial or in-kind contribution from the external partner towards the PhD project. If the nature of the proposal entails time spent away based within the collaborating organisation, we would anticipate that the organisation should meet the costs of the doctoral researcher undertaking this.
- Support the development of the doctoral researcher.
- Sign contract with UoB/ Centre-UB.

Centre-UB can provide support for connecting partner organisations and University of Birmingham supervisors:

- If you are a partner organisation, have a specific interest related to behavioural research, and are interested in supporting a PhD project, but are looking for an appropriate University

of Birmingham supervisor, we can advertise your area of interest on our website and put you in touch with a suitable University of Birmingham supervisor.

- If you are a University of Birmingham academic member of staff and have ideas for a PhD project, we can advertise your project idea on our website.

To take advantage of these opportunities, please complete this [online form](#).

Project Allocation

Fifteen ESRC/UoB funded projects are available per year, which will be allocated following competitive evaluation. Projects will be evaluated based on the scientific quality of the project, fit with Centre-UB remit, potential for impact, external partner collaboration, and supervisory team.

Application and Selection Process

- Supervisors submit a project proposal together with an external partner, which includes the involvement and commitment from the external partner throughout the PhD.
- The project application form, together with a letter of support from the partner organisation, should be submitted [through this website](#). You can access the application form from the [Centre-UB](#) website.
- The Selection Board evaluates all applications (see below for criteria) and selects 15 projects to be advertised.
- Supervisors interview and nominate their preferred candidate for shortlisting
 - *Supervisors will be given guidance related to recruitment and interview processes*
- Members of the Selection Board evaluate nomination forms and decide on the final award of the studentships.

Project selection criteria

- ***Project content***
 - Behavioural research with a clear fit with remit of Centre-UB
 - Scientific quality of the PhD project
 - Feasibility of the project as a PhD project within the given timeframe (i.e., up to 4 years, including sufficient time for training and personal development, opportunities for developing research and transferable skills)
 - Interdisciplinary research projects are encouraged, including cross-school/college supervisory teams
 - Clear training and development opportunities
- ***Impact and outcomes***
 - Potential for impact
- ***Partner organisation collaboration***
 - Evidence of co-development with partner organisation, showing that the partner is not just a site for data collection.
 - In-kind or financial contributions of the partner organisation
- ***Supervisory team***
 - Appropriate expertise in the supervisory team to support the PhD work
 - Clear arrangements for supervision with supervisor based with the partner organisation

Timeline

The project application form together with a letter from the partner organisation should be submitted [through this website](#).

Deadline for submitting a project application is Tuesday 25 November 2026, 1pm.

July 2025	Call for projects
25 November 2025	Deadline for project applications
December 2025	Notification of outcome of project
January – February 2026	Advertisement of projects and recruitment of applicants
March 2025	Deadline for nomination of selected candidates for studentship from supervisors to Centre-UB
April 2025	Notification of outcomes to applicant

If you have any enquiries or for further information, please contact:

centre-ubehaviour@contacts.bham.ac.uk

This call is specifically for PhD project funded by the ESRC and the University of Birmingham. We also welcome applications funded by external partners. Please contact us at centre-ubehaviour@contacts.bham.ac.uk to discuss this opportunity in more detail, including the application process and timeline.