



SGSSS Studentship Award Marking Framework 2022/23

Assessment for All Awards (+3 and 1+3)

Applications are to be assessed according to three components (where applicable) with a maximum total score out of 25. These components are:

1. Candidate Capabilities – Score out of 10

This component of the marking framework is aimed at assessing the whole person - not just academic achievements but also resourcefulness, commitment and resilience as demonstrated by broader professional and life experiences. It focuses on likely preparedness and potential to:

- undertake and complete a PhD;
- to flourish with ESRC funding;
- and, to contribute to a positive PhD community

Assessment is split into two parts: obtained and expected academic achievements; and, professional and life experiences. Each part is allocated 5 marks.

2. Research Proposal– Score out of 10

Particular attention should be paid to the stage of the candidate, i.e., candidates without a recent Master's might be expected to have a less well worked through research proposal that is none-the-less thought to be excellent in its originality, use of conceptual framing, broad methodological approach and/or likely societal impact. Please note that you may also review applications from students already registered on a PhD programme – such applicants would be expected to have very well-advanced proposals with high levels of specificity across the various components.

3. Supervision and Training – Score out of 5

This component assesses the candidate's fit with the supervisory team and wider department/school/college as well as the quality of the plans to meet student's likely training needs.

1. Candidate Capabilities (Total score out of 10)

This component of the marking framework is aimed at assessing the **whole person** - not just academic achievements but also resourcefulness, commitment and resilience as demonstrated by broader professional and life experiences. It focuses on likely preparedness and potential to:

- undertake and complete a PhD;
- to flourish with ESRC funding;
- and, to contribute to a positive PhD community.

Assessment is split into two parts: obtained and expected academic achievements; and, professional and life experiences. Each part is allocated 5 marks.

Reviewers should familiarise themselves with the relevant questions sets within the application form and may find it useful to refer to the sample responses provided (see **Appendix 1**) which illustrate how professional and life experiences and their alignment with preparedness and potential might be assessed.

Scores	Descriptors for Academic Qualifications <i>Please consider submitted transcripts, references, candidate CV. Discretion should be used with regard to candidates with existing qualifications outside the social sciences or with social science qualifications deemed to be outside the disciplinary requirements.</i>	Scores	Descriptors for Professional and Life Experiences <i>Please consider submitted candidate CV, references, responses to questions within the application form on 'Preparedness to do a PhD' and 'Contributing to a positive and diverse PhD community'.</i>
5	Student has obtained (or there is strong evidence that the candidate will obtain) a first class degree/ distinction at Masters AND has been awarded prizes or other significant academic distinctions.	4-5	Drawing on their professional/life experiences, showing resilience, resourcefulness and commitment, the Student explicitly articulates very good/outstanding potential to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ undertake and complete a PhD; ▪ to flourish as a result of PhD funding, and; ▪ to be a proactive contributor to a positive research culture.
4	Student has obtained (or there is strong evidence that the candidate will obtain) a first class degree/ distinction at Masters OR student has obtained (there is strong evidence that that the candidate will obtain) a 2:1/merit AND with a first class/ distinction for the dissertation.		
2-3	Student has obtained (or there is strong evidence that the candidate will obtain) a 2:1 class degree/ merit at Masters OR student has obtained (there is strong evidence that that the candidate will obtain) a 2:2/pass at Masters AND with a 2:1 class/ distinction for the dissertation.	2-3	Drawing on their professional/life experiences, showing resilience, resourcefulness and commitment, the Student explicitly articulates good potential to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ undertake and complete a PhD; ▪ to flourish as a result of PhD funding, and; ▪ to be a proactive contributor to a positive research culture.
1	Student has obtained (or there is strong evidence that the candidate will obtain) a 2:2 class degree/ pass at Masters.	0-1	Application does not adequately draw out potential to undertake and complete a PhD and flourish as a result of PhD funding as evidenced by academic background and professional/life experiences.
0	No evidence of obtaining or likelihood of obtaining a 2.2 degree at undergraduate level.		

2. Research Proposal (Score out of 10)

Particular attention should be paid to the stage of the candidate, i.e., candidates without a recent Master's might be expected to have a less well worked through research proposal that is none-the-less thought to be excellent in its originality, use of conceptual framing, broad methodological approach and/or likely societal impact. Please note that you may also review applications from students already registered on a PhD programme – such applicants would be expected to have very well-advanced proposals with high levels of specificity across the various components.

Scores	Descriptors
10	An excellent proposal scoring well in terms of both cogency and originality. All components – overview, context, methodology, and impact – will be well thought out and clearly expressed <i>for the stage of the candidate</i> . Plus Proposal is exceptionally good in all of its components and fulfils criteria 7 to 9 below.
9	Proposal is original and at the cutting edge of developments substantively and/or methodologically (<i>this may be less well specified by still discernible for students without Masters training</i>). Plus Fulfils criteria 7 and 8 below.
8	Proposal contains awareness of the potential impact of the research (<i>this may be less well specified but still discernible for students without Masters training</i>). Plus Fulfils criterion 7 below.
7	A well-defined proposal with researchable questions, appropriately identified sources, an awareness of the theoretical and empirical background to the research and an appropriate methodology cognisant of potential ethical issues. The proposal should display an awareness of the research of the economic and societal relevance feasible within 3 years of a funded PhD including appropriate risk assessment. <i>Levels of methodological detail and conceptual framing may be less detailed for those students without Masters training.</i>
6	A good proposal with only minor but still identifiable weaknesses. The research question will be clear, the methodology appropriate and clearly presented, and most of the appropriate literature identified.
5	A promising proposal that suffers from several weaknesses. The methodology is appropriate but ill-expressed. The proposal is only weakly grounded in relevant literature.
4	A proposal with one serious weakness or several minor ones, which suggests gaps in knowledge and a weak grasp of the proposed methodology and its suitability.
3	A proposal with significant weaknesses in multiple components, little appreciation of possible methodologies, and/or awareness of relevant literature.
0-2	A problematic proposal that would need considerable additional work before being fundable. All or most components of the proposal will require further work and/or demonstrate little or no background or interest in their subject.

3. Supervision and Training (Score out of 5)

This component assesses the candidate's fit with the supervisory team and wider department/school/college as well as the quality of the plans to meet student's likely training needs.

Scores	Descriptors
5	Supervision arrangements represent a near-perfect fit with the proposed research in relation to methods, substantive topic area and academic/policy networks. The supervisory team includes at least one experienced supervisor with recognised expertise in the field (SGSSS is very supportive of the inclusion of a less experienced supervisor for capacity building reasons). There is excellent fit between the research and the wider department/school/college. The supervisory team has carefully considered the student's likely training needs and has excellent plans for meeting these within and outside the home HEI.
4	Supervision arrangements represent a very good fit with the proposed research in relation to methods, substantive topic area and academic/policy networks. The supervisory team includes at least one experienced supervisor with a strong reputation for research in this field. There is very good fit between the research and the wider department/school/college. The supervisory team has carefully considered the student's likely training needs and has very good plans for meeting these within and outside the home HEI.
3	Supervision arrangements represent a good fit with the proposed research in relation to methods, substantive topic area and academic/policy networks. The supervisory team includes at least one experienced supervisor with a good reputation for research in this field. There is good fit between the research and the wider department/school/college. The supervisory team has considered the student's likely training needs and has good plans for meeting these within and outside the home HEI.
2	Supervision arrangements are appropriate though the fit is not as strong as it could be although at least one supervisor has some experience in the area of the proposed research in relation to methods, substantive topic area and academic/policy networks. There is some fit between the research and the wider department/school/college although the relationship might be rather weak. The supervisory team has given some consideration to the student's likely training needs but plans to meet these within and outside the home HEI are underdeveloped.
0-1	There is a poor fit between the proposal and supervisor experience and/or the wider department/school/college AND/OR consideration of likely training needs and how they will be addressed is cursory/generic.

Appendix 1

Candidate Capabilities: Sample Responses to the Questions on Preparedness to do the PhD and Diversity (Contributing to a positive PhD community)

The sample responses below are illustrative and obviously far from exhaustive – there are a myriad of circumstances and achievements which might be represented in student responses and multiple ways in which they could be presented as benefiting the PhD/PhD community. They are also imperfect because they are not drawn from real student responses since we are asking the questions either for the first time or in a new format (we will be able to refine these for subsequent years based on feedback and real-life examples). **The key issue for assessors is whether statements of preparedness and diversity convincingly connect to and demonstrate potential for undertaking/completing a PhD; flourishing as a result of PhD funding and contributing to a positive PhD community.**

1. Scoring in the 4-5 bracket; below we present three sample answers:

Candidate A

Drawing on your own background (including your life experiences, journey to/through university, work experiences or volunteering) please provide a summary of why you are ready to undertake a PhD now and how you will flourish as a result of PhD funding. You might include, for example, personal challenges that you have overcome or achievements that you are proud of in your work, study or life experiences and how these map onto the skills required to flourish in a PhD programme. Challenges could include, but are not limited to, protected characteristics, socio-economic status and of being first-in-a-generation to university or care-experienced.

I was awarded a 2:1 in Sociology in 2016 and just missed getting a first-class degree. As a first-generation student who had to work long hours to finance my education, I really started to get to grips with the academic world in my senior honours year and once I got my teeth into my own research for my dissertation, I realised that I wanted to try and continue my career in academic research. My undergraduate degree wasn't plain-sailing because of my circumstances (as well as not having a close network of family members with university experience and having to fit my study into short periods of time outside of work, I also had a lot of caring responsibilities for my younger siblings), but I believe that I showed great resilience in juggling tasks and managing deadlines and these are important to the PhD where I will have to direct my own time and make decisions about how to fit in training, when to do an internship and also get the balance right in terms of independent study and talking/listening to those people involved in my area of research (migrant experiences of the Scottish Education system). Because I couldn't afford to fund a Master's programme, I chose to find work after my degree in order to save for a Masters and after taking some administrative roles in various organisations, I got a job with the Scottish Refugee Council where I have been working as an outreach worker supporting young adult children of refugees and those seeking asylum. I have developed a research proposal based on knowledge gaps evident from my own practice as well as by the wider refugee community and within the academic literature. This means I will be well placed to make a contribution to practice at the end of my study (I already have a good network of practitioners across the UK). I have demonstrated resourcefulness in my work through trying different ways to engage with young adults who have come through traumatic experiences – over the course of 6 months I persevered until I found a successful approach – I was asked to speak about this at a practitioner conference last year – this experience will stand me in good stead for planning participant recruitment.

Reflecting on your own background and/or proposed approach to PhD study and the opportunities which it will present, how will you support diversity and inclusion in the PhD community?

I am aware that first-generation students are under-represented at PhD level – I think it is important to bring that voice to the community to help new and established academics understand the different kinds of privilege that can implicitly dominate in academia (this is something that I found myself doing with my

undergraduate peers and also my dissertation supervision). For one semester in my undergraduate programme I volunteered on a student helpline – the experience from this, although brief, has taught me to listen out for signs of underlying issues with my peers and I think this could be very helpful during my PhD because I know that some students find the PhD difficult from a mental health point of view. My research will also benefit from an appreciation of how diversity in research samples changes findings in important ways – I have seen from my own practice how it really pays to persevere to include groups that maybe take more effort to engage with.

This applicant would receive a 4 (out of 5) for academic achievement. She is likely to be scored as 5 (out of 5) for professional/life experiences. She provides an outstanding articulation of her preparedness to undertake a PhD, to flourish with funding and to contribute to a positive PhD community. She demonstrates how her resilience in over-coming challenges (first generation, financial pressure, work and caring responsibilities) during her undergraduate programme map onto the PhD. She provides evidence of commitment to doing the PhD and resourcefulness in overcoming a problem of direct relevance to PhD work. She shows awareness of the PhD as more than a piece of independent study. Her response on diversity covers a number of features – diversity as part of the research process, a plausible commitment to supporting others (evidencing an example of past experiences) and an awareness of different privileges within the academy (note, applicants do not require to be a member of an unrepresented group to obtain a high score in this component). In total for candidate capabilities this applicant would likely score 9 (out of a total of 10).

Candidate B

Drawing on your own background (including your life experiences, journey to/through university, work experiences or volunteering) please provide a summary of why you are ready to undertake a PhD now and how you will flourish as a result of PhD funding. You might include, for example, personal challenges that you have overcome or achievements that you are proud of in your work, study or life experiences and how these map onto the skills required to flourish in a PhD programme. Challenges could include, but are not limited to, protected characteristics, socio-economic status and of being first-in-a-generation to university or care-experienced.

I got a first-class honours in Economics and am expected to get a distinction in my Master's degree next summer. This shows that I am academically suited to further study. I'd also like to draw attention to the fact that my qualifications have been achieved whilst being sole parent to my 5-year-old son. These caring responsibilities, whilst they have meant that I have been unable to undertake paid work, have taught me how to plan my time carefully and to develop very strong discipline – I have had to fit my assignments and my dissertation around care and, recently, around lockdown restrictions and school holidays. These skills will be helpful as I move into a PhD (which I plan to do part-time) where I will be working in a self-directed way and in ensuring that I take up the wider opportunities that being a PhD student offers. Looking at the Researcher Development Framework helped me to identify some of the training that I will need to do over the course of the PhD and I have enrolled on two courses in the current academic year so that I can stagger my learning and I've been talking to my supervisor about an internship opportunity that I would like to organise with the Institute of Fiscal Studies (related to my PhD proposal). I am very committed to research being useful and have seen how this can be achieved as a result of the excellent seminar series that my school runs with external speakers – that is where I was introduced to IFS. A final element that I would like to mention is that I was the class representative during my senior honours year and during my Masters year. This has really given me an insight into the staff as well as the student perspective of the higher education system and will be very useful as I transition into a PGR student where I am very keen to develop teaching skills – I think these will be useful regardless of whether I stay working in a university or move to a different career related to research.

Reflecting on your own background and/or proposed approach to PhD study and the opportunities which it will present, how will you support diversity and inclusion in the PhD community?

I want to draw attention to a couple of aspects of my experience in response to this question. First of all, being a single parent background means that I have an understanding of how people's university experience is affected by so much more than what goes on in the university – this means that I always assume that people can be having a hard time because of factors that I don't know anything about. This approach makes me less judgemental. Second, aside from my own circumstances, my class rep role has made me much more confident in sounding people out about complex issues, summarising views and presenting conflicting perspectives – this will be very helpful training for me as I want to help develop a voice for social science students in my university which is quite science oriented. The third thing I'd mention is that my own situation has made me question some of the demographic categories that we use in social science research – this kind of questioning will be of value in my analysis of secondary data.

This applicant would receive a 4 (out of 5) for academic achievement. He is also likely to be scored as a 5 (out of 5) for professional/life experiences. Although his caring responsibilities have meant that he has been unable to take up opportunities outside the university, he provides an outstanding articulation of his preparedness to undertake a PhD, to flourish with funding and to contribute to a positive PhD community. He demonstrates his resilience in over-coming challenges (very significant caring responsibilities) during his undergraduate programme and into his Masters and understands how these map onto the PhD. He provides evidence of commitment to doing the PhD and resourcefulness in starting his planning around training and other opportunities. He shows awareness of the PhD as more than a piece of independent study. His response on diversity covers a number of features – diversity as part of the research process, a plausible commitment to supporting others (evidencing an example of past experiences) and an awareness of different privileges within the academy (note, applicants do not require to be a member of an unrepresented group to obtain a high score in this component). In total for candidate capabilities this applicant would likely score 9 (out of total of 10).

Candidate C

Drawing on your own background (including your life experiences, journey to/through university, work experiences or volunteering) please provide a summary of why you are ready to undertake a PhD now and how you will flourish as a result of PhD funding. You might include, for example, personal challenges that you have overcome or achievements that you are proud of in your work, study or life experiences and how these map onto the skills required to flourish in a PhD programme. Challenges could include, but are not limited to, protected characteristics, socio-economic status and of being first-in-a-generation to university or care-experienced.

I have a very strong academic background with top grades from school through my whole undergraduate programme – I received a first class honours in Psychology and won the best dissertation and top in class prizes and am now doing a research masters. My supervisors have been encouraging me to do a PhD since my junior honours year. These achievements (especially my dissertation) show that I am able to think critically, organise my time and undertake independent research. For the last two summers I have worked as a junior researcher within my supervisor's lab – in this role I have been responsible for boosting recruitment, taking responsibility for elements of research design and summarising data for funder reports. As a result, I have been included as an author in two research papers. This experience has really expanded my understanding of how research operates – the challenges that have to be dealt with on a day-to-day basis and the ways in which researchers need to work closely with funders and other stakeholders in how they conduct and disseminate their research. Some of the contacts I've made in this work will be helpful in establishing a support network for my PhD and in thinking through my future career options – I've started discussions with researchers in Colorado who are part of this work to see if I could undertake a visit to their lab during my PhD. I have used my experience in the lab to refine my own original research project based on a knowledge of what is achievable and to help make decisions about which courses to take in my Master's year so that I have the best possible start to the funded PhD.

Reflecting on your own background and/or proposed approach to PhD study and the opportunities which it will present, how will you support diversity and inclusion in the PhD community?

I do not come from an under-represented group but my work as a research assistant has helped me to appreciate how diversity is linked to representation in research and to the fact that good research needs to be properly representative. In my undergraduate programme I became interested in how research can provide poor guidance to industry and to clinicians when it doesn't take gender differences into account. In my research work I had a role in thinking through research samples and in boosting recruitment in under-represented groups – this has led to me being aware of representation both as a technical issue and in relation to the personal skills needed to be more inclusive. I used this learning to give a talk to my peers and I would be keen to share this learning with a PhD cohort and to learn from others who have had less privileged backgrounds.

This applicant would receive a 5 (out of 5) for academic achievement. She is also likely to be scored as a 4 (out of 5) for professional/life experiences. Although she doesn't demonstrate resilience in overcoming significant challenges, she does provide an outstanding articulation of her preparedness to undertake a PhD, to flourish with funding and to contribute to a positive PhD community. She has clearly shown how her work experience as a junior research assistant maps onto the conduct of the PhD including dissemination. She provides evidence of commitment to doing the PhD and resourcefulness in starting his planning around training and other opportunities. She shows awareness of the PhD as more than a piece of independent study. Her response on diversity covers a number of features – diversity as part of the research process, a plausible commitment to supporting the development of others and some awareness of different privileges within the academy although she does not express this in a way that strongly demonstrates relevance to undertaking a PhD – see candidate A in comparison (note, applicants do not require to be a member of an unrepresented group to obtain a high score in this component). In total for candidate capabilities this applicant would likely score 9 (out of a total of 10).

2. Scoring in the 2-3 bracket; below we present three sample answers:

Candidate D (note similarities with **Candidate A**)

Drawing on your own background (including your life experiences, journey to/through university, work experiences or volunteering) please provide a summary of why you are ready to undertake a PhD now and how you will flourish as a result of PhD funding. You might include, for example, personal challenges that you have overcome or achievements that you are proud of in your work, study or life experiences and how these map onto the skills required to flourish in a PhD programme. Challenges could include, but are not limited to, protected characteristics, socio-economic status and of being first-in-a-generation to university or care-experienced.

I was awarded a 2:1 in Sociology in 2016 and got a first for my dissertation. As a first-generation student, I had to work during my studies and I had to learn to manage deadlines – this is a skill which will be important to undertaking a PhD. Because I couldn't afford to fund a Master's programme, I chose to find work after my degree in order to save for a Masters and after taking some administrative roles in various organisations, I got a job with the Scottish Refugee Council where I have been working as an outreach worker supporting young adult children of refugees and those seeking asylum. I have developed a research proposal based on knowledge gaps evident from my own practice as well as by the wider refugee community and within the academic literature – this means that my PhD will be of great relevance to practitioners.

Reflecting on your own background and/or proposed approach to PhD study and the opportunities which it will present, how will you support diversity and inclusion in the PhD community?

I am aware that first-generation students are under-represented at PhD level – I think it is important to bring that voice to the community. For one semester in my undergraduate programme I volunteered on a student helpline – the experience from this, although brief, has taught me to listen out for signs of

underlying issues with my peers and I think this could be very helpful during my PhD because I know that some students find the PhD difficult from a mental health point of view.

This applicant would receive a 4 (out of 5) for academic achievement. She is likely to be scored as 3 (out of 5) for professional/life experiences. She provides a good but not outstanding articulation of her preparedness to undertake a PhD, to flourish with funding and to contribute to a positive PhD community. She demonstrates how her resilience in over-coming challenges (first generation, financial pressure, work responsibilities) during her undergraduate programme map onto some aspects of the PhD. She provides evidence of commitment to doing the PhD but doesn't give a clear example of resourcefulness. She shows awareness of the PhD as more than a piece of independent study. Her response on diversity covers a number of features – diversity as part of the research process, a plausible commitment to supporting others (evidencing an example of past experiences) and an awareness of different privileges within the academy (note, applicants do not require to be a member of an unrepresented group to obtain a high score in this component). In total for candidate capabilities this applicant would likely score 7 (out of a total of 10).

Candidate E

Drawing on your own background (including your life experiences, journey to/through university, work experiences or volunteering) please provide a summary of why you are ready to undertake a PhD now and how you will flourish as a result of PhD funding. You might include, for example, personal challenges that you have overcome or achievements that you are proud of in your work, study or life experiences and how these map onto the skills required to flourish in a PhD programme. Challenges could include, but are not limited to, protected characteristics, socio-economic status and of being first-in-a-generation to university or care-experienced.

I have a degree in Education (2:1) and this is the ideal foundation for my PhD which is also in Education and I plan to use a theoretical framework for my thesis which I used in my dissertation. I also really enjoyed studying research methods and I am looking forward to studying these further in my 1+3 and putting them to use in my mixed methods study. During my undergraduate degree I did lots of part-time work in bars which shows my resilience (working long hours) and I am looking forward to getting work experience in teaching undergraduates. I am very committed to doing a PhD and have the dedication and focus that it takes; also I enjoy working and communicating with others and know that this is a key skill in doing research and presenting findings so that results are taken seriously and make a difference.

Reflecting on your own background and/or proposed approach to PhD study and the opportunities which it will present, how will you support diversity and inclusion in the PhD community?

Diversity and how to measure and understand it is central to my PhD which will be using the concept of intersectionality in relation to which I hope will inform education policy around primary education and protected characteristics. Personally, I am a very good listener and extremely empathetic – in my undergraduate degree I played an important informal role nurturing some of my peers in group learning sets and was commended by my lecturer – I will bring that experience to working in an inclusive way with my PhD colleagues.

This applicant would receive a 3 (out of 5) for academic achievement. He is likely to be scored as 2 (out of 5) for professional/life experiences. He provides a relatively basic articulation of his preparedness to undertake a PhD and to flourish with funding. His planned contribution to a positive PhD community is stronger and set out more clearly. His commitment to doing a PhD is stated but not very well evidenced; resilience is similarly stated but not directly tied into the PhD. He shows some awareness of the PhD as more than a piece of independent study. His response on diversity covers a commitment to inclusivity as an area of study in order to contribute to social justice goals and some evidence that he would be a supportive peer. In total for candidate capabilities this applicant would likely score 5 (out of a total of 10).

Candidate F

Drawing on your own background (including your life experiences, journey to/through university, work experiences or volunteering) please provide a summary of why you are ready to undertake a PhD now and how you will flourish as a result of PhD funding. You might include, for example, personal challenges that you have overcome or achievements that you are proud of in your work, study or life experiences and how these map onto the skills required to flourish in a PhD programme. Challenges could include, but are not limited to, protected characteristics, socio-economic status and of being first-in-a-generation to university or care-experienced.

I received a first-class honours in Politics and a merit in my International Relations Masters. Since graduating three years ago I have been working for a thinktank where I have been getting a very good grounding in the real-world research process and in using mixed methods to address a range of social problems. I can think of no better background for doing a PhD – I have learned how to ensure that research questions are very clear, that fieldwork is done in a timely fashion and that it is written in a clear fashion suitable for different kinds of audience (some of our clients are academics and some are policymakers or strategic leads in local authorities). I also now have a great network of colleagues working in research consultancy and this will be able to be carried into my PhD and will help with personal support and in supporting dissemination of my PhD research on international voting preferences. I have gained experience in speaking at conferences with mixed academic and policy audiences and this will help give me confidence as I transition back to academic research. My resilience can be shown by the way I dealt with the long-term illness and death of a close family member whilst undertaking a contract with pressured deadlines – I learned how to be honest about my situation and to seek help quickly – ultimately, I was able to fulfil my job requirements with a period of reduced hours.

Reflecting on your own background and/or proposed approach to PhD study and the opportunities which it will present, how will you support diversity and inclusion in the PhD community?

I believe that diversity is really important for any organisation including for the further education sector and, as a member of the BME community, I am fully committed to attempts to widen access to groups who have been underrepresented. I have done unconscious bias and EDI training as part of my job.

This applicant would receive a 4 (out of 5) for academic achievement. She is also likely to be scored as a 3 (out of 5) for professional/life experiences. She provides good articulation of her preparedness to undertake a PhD and to flourish with funding although her preparedness to contribute to a positive PhD community is mostly aspirational and non-specific in terms of evidence. She has clearly shown how her work experience in a thinktank is relevant to a PhD including dissemination and working with peers. She provides evidence of commitment to doing the PhD (stepping back from an existing career path) and resourcefulness in starting his planning around training and other opportunities. She shows awareness of the PhD as more than a piece of independent study. Her response on diversity is weaker than would be expected for a top score – no mention of why diversity is important and the commitment to support is aspirational. The total score for candidate capabilities would likely be 7 (out of a total of 10).

3. Scoring in the 0-1 bracket; below we present one sample answer:

Candidate G (note similarities with Candidate B)

Drawing on your own background (including your life experiences, journey to/through university, work experiences or volunteering) please provide a summary of why you are ready to undertake a PhD now and how you will flourish as a result of PhD funding. You might include, for example, personal challenges that you have overcome or achievements that you are proud of in your work, study or life experiences and how these map onto the skills required to flourish in a PhD programme. Challenges could include, but are not limited to, protected characteristics, socio-economic status and of being first-in-a-generation to university or care-experienced.

I am ideally suited to doing a PhD because of my qualifications achieved as a non-traditional student:

- First class undergraduate degree in Economic and Social History
- Class prize for dissertation
- Expected to receive Distinction at Masters
- Class representative for three years
- Single parent

Reflecting on your own background and/or proposed approach to PhD study and the opportunities which it will present, how will you support diversity and inclusion in the PhD community?

I am a member of an under-represented group and will be able to act as a role model for future generations of students.

This applicant will score 5 (out of 5) for his academic achievements. He would likely score 1 (out of 5) for professional/life experiences because he has not articulated how his experiences map onto the PhD journey; he would score a 1 rather than 0 because he links his own social position with the need to represent diversity. His total candidate capabilities score would be 6 (out of a total of 10).