



ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR POSTGRADUATE RESEARCHER (PGR) SCHEME 2026-2027

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR STUDENTS STARTING COURSES IN ACADEMIC YEAR (AY) 2026/27

- 1 Students in full-time employment are not eligible for an award. A Student in part-time employment may be eligible for a part-time award. Part-time study is equivalent to 50% of full-time study, unless a reasonable adjustment has been arranged for a disabled student.
- 2 Candidates who already hold a doctoral degree or who have been registered on a programme of research leading to the award of a doctoral degree on a full-time basis for more than one year, or part-time equivalent, funded from any source, including self-financing students, are NOT eligible for a Studentship.
- 3 A Department for the Economy Studentship cannot be held at the same time as any other award which provides maintenance and/or fees for postgraduate training.
- 4 Students are required to be resident in Northern Ireland on the first day of the course and for the duration of their studies unless exceptional circumstances apply e.g. medical reasons. Any time spent outside Northern Ireland should be for the purposes of fieldwork, study visits or conference attendance.
- 5 The Department has set a cap of 30% on the number of ‘international’ students which may be enrolled each academic year through this Scheme. ‘International’ students are classified as those who would pay fees at the ‘international’ rate if enrolling at the University as a fee-paying student. Further details are available on the Universities’ websites or at [Know the basics for HE Northern Ireland](#).
- 6 As the University manages the recruitment process on the Department’s behalf, the University Authority will determine the classification of the student as either ‘home’ or ‘international’ and advise the student on the documentation required to support the application. Any queries should be directed to the University.
- 7 Subject to paragraph 9, to be eligible for a Studentship from academic year 2026/27, the research topic must align with key economic sectors and identified priority areas for research, as approved by the Department. These are informed by, but not limited to, the [NI Executive’s Programme for Government](#), the [Economy Minister’s Economic Vision](#), the [DfE Sectoral Action Plans](#) and initiatives under the [City & Growth Deals](#).
- 8 The priority research areas will be reviewed on an annual basis by the Department and agreed with the Universities to inform the Universities’ recruitment process. The University will recruit students for the approved research topics on the Department’s behalf.

- 9 The Department strongly encourages collaborative PhDs involving the University and a relevant business/organisation/public body, and these will also be considered for funding.

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- 10 The required academic qualification for a DfE funded studentship, is a first or upper second-class honours degree from a University in the United Kingdom or Ireland, or qualifications and experience considered by the University as equivalent to this standard.
- 11 Students must be able to demonstrate a capability to undertake and benefit from research training through to completion to the standard necessary to qualify for a PhD.
- 12 Candidates must have official, final results of all qualifications to be used to meet the academic requirements before the start of the Studentship.