Scholars' Fund 2026-27

Expression of Interest Form
Guidance for Applicants

The Expression of Interest (EOI) is the first step in applying to the Scholars' Fund. At this stage, we only need a brief outline of your idea so that the *Scholars' Fund Scoring Panel* can decide whether to invite you to develop a full proposal. Working Groups may provide early advice if you wish to approach them, but they do not select EOIs. Student-led ideas must be submitted via the Students' Guild or Students' Union. Individual students cannot submit EOIs directly. Applicants should contact the Guild/SU for support where relevant.

Before completing your EOI, please read this guidance alongside Reimbursement and Finance Guidance, which outlines eligible cost types, the reimbursement process and evidence requirements.

1. What the Scholars' Fund supports

The Scholars' Fund can support students at all levels of study and across all fee statuses who are facing financial hardship or experiencing barriers to access, participation, success or progression, particularly those from underrepresented or disadvantaged groups. For the purposes of the Scholars' Fund, *underrepresented students* include (but are not limited to):

- students from low-participation areas (POLAR4 Q1–Q2)
- students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (IMD Q1–Q2)
- care leavers
- estranged students
- student carers
- mature students
- asylum-seekers and refugees
- students with disabilities
- racially minoritised students
- Gypsy, Roma and Traveller students
- student parents
- service children (where applicable)

The Scholars' Fund is financed through small philanthropic gifts, and proposals should offer meaningful student benefit that can be delivered within a single academic year.

2. Funding available

The Scholars' Fund has a total budget of £100,000 for the 2026/27 cycle. Most projects are expected to fall in the region of £20,000–£40,000, but the Panel may consider proposals outside this range where there is clear and proportionate student benefit. We expect to invite 4–6 EOIs to the full proposal stage and to fund approximately three projects. This indicative range helps ensure that funded projects are substantial, feasible within a single academic year, and collectively make full use of the available fund. Full details on eligible and ineligible costs are set out in Reimbursement and Finance Guidance.

3. What the EOI is for

The EOI is the first step in the application process. It allows the Scholars' Fund Scoring Panel to understand your idea and decide whether to invite you to develop a full proposal.

You are encouraged to speak to a Success for All Working Group (WG) before submitting an EOI. WGs can help you:

- sense check the idea
- clarify which student group it supports
- consider feasibility
- identify any early risks

However, WGs do not select EOIs. All EOIs are reviewed by the Scoring Panel.

At this stage, we do *not* expect detailed planning, budgets or delivery arrangements.

4. What information you need to provide

4.1. Applicant details

Your name, email address and which faculty or division you work in, or if you work for the Students' Guild or Students' Union. If this is a student-led idea, the application must be submitted by the Students' Guild or Students' Union. Individual students cannot submit EOIs directly.

4.2. Short project summary (up to 200 words)

[Type here]

Use simple, clear language to explain:

- what the idea is
- which students it would benefit
- what the intended support or activity is

4.3. Estimated scale and cost

You will be asked to give:

- an approximate number of students who may benefit
- an indicative total cost

Either a broad reach, light-touch intervention or a small cohort, deeper impact proposal is acceptable. Please provide an indicative total cost. Most projects are expected to fall in the region of £20,000–£40,000, but the Panel may consider lower- or higher-cost projects where the scale of impact is clear. Detailed budget breakdowns are not required at the EOI stage.

Full cost eligibility rules are provided the Reimbursement and Finance Guidance.

4.4. Eligibility self-declaration

To ensure proposals are appropriate for the Fund, you will be asked to confirm that:

a) the project supports students facing hardship or barriers.

   Your idea should address a financial or structural barrier to access, success or progression. Examples include:

   - transport costs preventing engagement
   - food insecurity
   - digital access issues caused by financial hardship
   - support for specific student groups (mature, care experienced, estranged, student parents, etc.)
   - targeted progression initiatives

b) the project **does not** cover hidden course costs

   These are costs students must pay to complete their course. Examples not eligible include:

   - mandatory field trip travel
   - required equipment (e.g. stethoscopes, lab coats)

The Scholars' Fund cannot replace department or Faculty budgets for compulsory activity.

c) the activity **is not** normally funded by a faculty, professional service or the Students' Guild or Union.

The Scholars' Fund cannot replace standard University funding. Projects must not include activity normally funded by Faculties, Divisions or Professional Services. This includes (but is not limited to):

- teaching materials or programme delivery costs
- mandatory or compulsory course elements (hidden course costs)
- baseline wellbeing support
- core digital infrastructure
- ongoing service delivery or operational activity

You should ensure that requested funding directly benefits students, as administrative overheads, staff costs and institutional responsibilities are ineligible under Appendix 11's reimbursement rules.

d) the activity is deliverable within the 2026/27 academic year.

Projects in this call must be deliverable within the 2026/27 academic year (August 2026 – July 2027). The Scholars' Fund is designed for single-year projects. Projects seeking to continue into a second year must submit a new EOI in the following cycle and demonstrate:

- clear impact in Year 1;
- evidence of unmet or ongoing need;
  and
- why the project cannot transition to sustainable Faculty/Service funding.

d) the delivery team has confirmed operational feasibility.

You must confirm that the delivery team has the capacity to deliver the project within the timescale any external organisations have a defined and feasible role

e) The budget holder agrees to cover upfront costs prior to reimbursement.

The relevant budget holder has agreed to cover initial project expenditure before reimbursement. This reflects the reimbursement requirements that

all costs must be incurred first and supported by evidence before Global Advancement can reimburse them.

See Reimbursement and Finance Guidance

f) All costs directly benefit students.

You must confirm your idea can be delivered using existing administrative mechanisms (no new posts or overheads)

g) Student led ideas have been submitted via the Students' Union or Students' Guild.

Student led ideas must come through the Students' Guild or Students' Union so that proposed activities have the necessary organisational support and can be delivered safely and effectively.

h) The project team will provide a short outcome and expenditure summary and support light-touch Global Advancement insight requests.

If your project is awarded funding, you will be asked to provide a short outcomes and expenditure summary at the end of the delivery year. This helps the University understand how the Scholars' Fund is supporting students. You may also be asked to support light-touch requests from Global Advancement for student insights or case-study material, where feasible. These requirements are not expected to involve formal evaluation and are designed to be proportionate to the size and nature of the Fund.

If you answer "No" to any question, you may give a short explanation.

4.5. Working Group alignment

If you have discussed your idea with a working group, or believe it aligns with a particular theme, you can indicate this here. This helps us direct your proposal to the right colleagues if it progresses. Contacts for the working groups are provided below:

- **Fair Access and Widening Participation**: Kate Watson K.L.Watson@exeter.ac.uk
- **Transition and Induction**: Kate Watson K.L.Watson@exeter.ac.uk
- **Success and Inclusive Education**: Rachel Griffiths R.Griffiths@exeter.ac.uk
- **Progression**: Kayleigh Sandercock K.Sandercock@exeter.ac.uk
- **Student Funding and Affordability**: Kate Watson K.L.Watson@exeter.ac.uk

- **Diversity and Inclusion in Postgraduate**: Hilary Stevens hilary.j.stevens@exeter.ac.uk
- **International Student Experience**: Kate Watson K.L.Watson@exeter.ac.uk

If you are unsure which working group your idea aligns with email hilary.j.stevens@exeter.ac.uk.

5. What happens after you submit your EOI

Once submitted, your EOI will be reviewed by the Scholars' Fund Scoring Panel comprising representatives from the Students' Guild, Students' Union and Success for All Working Groups.

The Panel will use a Green/Amber/Red (G/A/R) framework to assess:

- whether the EOI identifies a clear student barrier;
- whether the likely benefit is realistic and meaningful (either breadth or depth);
- whether the idea appears deliverable within the year;
- whether the indicative scale is proportionate to a £100,000 fund.

The Panel will then decide whether to invite you to develop a full proposal, with advisory support from the most relevant Working Group. Only 4–6 EOIs will progress to the full proposal stage to keep the process proportionate.

You will be notified of the Panel's decision by 18:00 on Monday 30 March. If shortlisted, full proposals will need to be submitted by 18:00 on Friday 1 May.

The Panel may reallocate funding during the cycle if projects underspend or if the full allocation is not required. Underspent funds may be redistributed to strengthen existing projects, support reserve EOIs, or rolled into a future call, depending on student need and available time in the delivery year.

6. How to submit your EOI

Please submit your EOI using this online form by 18:00 on Friday, 20 March 2026. Email hilary.j.stevens@exeter.ac.uk if you have any questions. If you have already discussed your idea with a WG, please indicate this in your EOI.