

Call for joint PhD projects

01

Background

The University of Queensland (UQ) and the University of Exeter (Exeter) recognise that the most complex global challenges, ranging from food, mineral and water security to digital disruption, healthy living, and environmental and ecosystem health, require interdisciplinary research that spans institutions, countries, and continents. To address these challenges, the 2 universities established the UQ-Exeter Institute, enabling researchers to combine their complementary expertise to deliver global impact.

Building on a strong foundation of collaboration and academic exchange, the Institute continues to invest jointly in strengthening cross-institutional research capacity. In support of this vision, and building on 9 successful years of PhD studentships, the UQ-Exeter Institute is pleased to launch its 10th call for PhD project proposals.

The 2026 round of the UQ-Exeter Institute Call for PhD project proposals, for commencement in 2027, is now open. The online portal will close on the following dates:

- For Exeter project leads: **Thursday 26 February 2026 (11:59pm GMT)**
- For UQ project leads: **Friday 27 February 2026 (9:59am AEST)**

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Research themes

Research under the UQ-Exeter Institute aligns strongly with the [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#) (UN SDG). In 2026, projects will be sought from the 4 interdisciplinary research themes of the partnership:

1. **Digital Worlds and Disruptive Technologies:** Rapid advances in digital technologies such as generative AI, autonomous systems, and data-driven platforms are reshaping how societies live, work, and govern. This theme supports interdisciplinary research addressing both the opportunities and risks of digital transformation, including issues of security, trust, equity, and governance. Drawing on computer science, business, social science, and the arts/humanities, research under this theme explores areas such as cybersecurity, human-centred design, data science, and responsible innovation.
2. **Healthy Living:** Healthy populations underpin resilient economies and societies. This theme brings together the complementary strengths of UQ and Exeter to advance interdisciplinary research that supports health, wellbeing, and quality of life across the lifespan. The Healthy Living theme aligns particularly with UN SDG 3: Good Health and Wellbeing, and supports research that contributes to improved health outcomes, reduced inequalities, and evidence-informed policy and practice. Research spans biomedical science, genomics, health economics, mental health, human movement and nutrition, health technologies, and public health, with a strong emphasis on translation and real-world impact.

A partnership between

3. **Global Environmental Futures:** Addressing environmental change requires integrated, solutions-focused research that spans disciplines and scales. This theme supports collaborative research on climate change, biodiversity, clean energy, food and water security, pollution, and environmental governance. Building on world-leading expertise at both institutions, projects aim to improve the resilience of ecosystems and communities, inform policy, and contribute to the UN SDGs through impactful, interdisciplinary research.
4. **Mineral Security and Sustainability:** Secure and sustainable access to mineral resources is essential to human development, infrastructure, and the global energy transition. This theme supports interdisciplinary research addressing the discovery, supply, use, and governance of minerals, including their environmental, social, and economic impacts. Recognising that minerals are not explicitly addressed within the UN SDGs, research under this theme seeks to strengthen international understanding of how mineral resources can meaningfully contribute to human development while supporting and enabling the achievement of the SDGs through responsible and sustainable practices.

Read more about the Institute's research themes at uq-exeter.institute/research-themes.

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Studentships, funding, and fees

Studentship structure and funding arrangements

The UQ-Exeter joint PhD program aims to recruit the very best students to work across the University of Exeter and The University of Queensland towards joint doctoral degrees.

The program will cover the full costs for selected candidates (as outlined below). Where matched industry or third-party funding is secured, a single allocated studentship may be split to support up to 2 PhD candidates, without increasing the overall University funding commitment.

- **For Queensland researcher project leads:** Research Commercial Managers (RCMs) will be able to support you in exploring third-party funding if you have already identified an industry/third-party partner. Get in contact at research-support.uq.edu.au.
- **For Exeter research project leads:** If you're interested in exploring industry/third-party funding, please contact Exeter Innovation for advice at exeterinnovation.com/about/aboutus.

	Exeter-homed students	UQ-homed students
Tuition fees	3.5 years tuition fee scholarship	3.5 years tuition fee scholarship
Living stipend (3.5 years)	Students will be awarded an Exeter-funded scholarship equal to UKRI rate of £20,780 per annum tax free (2025-2026 rate), indexed annually, for up to 3.5 years.	Students will be awarded a Graduate School-funded scholarship of \$37,500 per annum tax free (2026 rate), indexed annually, for up to 3.5 years plus overseas Student Health Cover (OSHC). UQ-homed students will receive a stipend top-up to match the UKRI rate during their 12-month stay at the University of Exeter.

	Exeter-homed students	UQ-homed students
Project allowance	RTSG up to £10,715 over the duration of the scholarship for research consumables, workshops, training courses.	Research related costs are covered by UQ advisory team and/or local enrolling unit.
Travel allowance	Travel Allowance of £15,000 over the life of the scholarship. Please note that the Overseas Student Health Cover (OSHC) for periods of study at UQ is to be funded from the Travel Allowance.	Up to \$18,000 Travel and Development Allowance over the duration of the program to support travel and development activities, such as conferences, workshops and short course attendance.

The 10th cohort will begin their program in January 2027. In total, 8 PhD studentships will be awarded for the January 2027 intake, with one PhD candidate recruited per theme per institution. Of the total number of studentships funded, half the cohort (i.e., 4 students) will be homed at the University of Exeter and the other half at The University of Queensland.

PhD students in the joint program are expected to spend at least 12 months at the partner (host) institution. This arrangement ensures our students benefit from the expertise, facilities, guidance, and collaborative input of both supervisory teams and their research groups. When developing project proposals, project leads should plan the residency at the partner institution as either 2 separate 6-month blocks or a single 12-month block, rather than multiple shorter visits spread over the 3.5-year program. This structure not only supports deeper engagement with the host institution but also helps students secure long-term accommodation and reduces travel and health insurance costs, ensuring a more manageable and cost-effective experience.

Managing RTSG and travel allowance at visiting institution

For Exeter-homed candidates, the total Research Training Support Grant (RTSG) allocation will be split over the duration of the time they spend at Exeter. When in Queensland, the UQ supervisor will be expected to provide any necessary research expenditure as reasonably required to support the agreed research and supervision plan for the student. It will be the responsibility of the UQ supervisor to ensure the student's research costs are met while they are at UQ.

For Queensland-homed candidates, the principal supervisor will manage the costs of the student's research. When UQ students arrive at Exeter, they will be provided with a cost code for their RTSG with a maximum budget of up to £4,285 for the 12 months they are due to spend at Exeter. The students will be able to use this code directly to cover the costs of their research expenditure. Exeter supervisors will be responsible for monitoring and approving these costs.

It is essential that supervisors from both Exeter and UQ discuss and agree on how the research project costs will be managed during the candidate's time at each institution. This discussion must occur within the framework outlined above and be finalised before submitting a project proposal for consideration. No additional funding is available to supervisors or local areas beyond the amounts outlined above.

Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF) at UQ

UQ charges students the SSAF (\$120 per Research Quarter for PhD students up to a maximum of \$373 in 2026). This is a compulsory fee that the Australian Government requires universities to collect from students to help provide student services, support and amenities.

For all UQ-Exeter Institute students undertaking a period of research at UQ, payment of SSAF by the quarterly due date is required to remain actively enrolled at UQ. The SSAF is waived during periods of study at Exeter. Learn more about SSAF at my.uq.edu.au/information-and-services.

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Project proposals and shortlisting

Project proposals

The UQ-Exeter Institute joint PhD program aims to recruit the very best students to work across the University of Exeter and The University of Queensland towards joint doctoral degrees.

PhD project proposals must be jointly developed and supervised by academic staff at both The University of Queensland and the University of Exeter. Prospective supervisors are required to complete the online PhD project proposal form collaboratively with their supervisory counterparts at the partner institution. Complete the online proposal form at survey.app.uq.edu.au/uq-exeter-institute-joint-phd-project-submission.

The project lead at the home institution is responsible for submitting the joint project proposal via the online PhD project proposal form by the relevant closing date, in consultation with their supervisory counterpart at the partner institution.

- For Exeter project leads: **Thursday 26 February 2026 (11:59pm GMT)**
- For UQ project leads: **Friday 27 February 2026 (9:59am AEST)**

These different submission times reflect the time difference between the United Kingdom and Australia. Closing dates are strictly enforced.

Supervisor eligibility

To ensure the success of joint PhD projects, supervisors from both The University of Queensland and the University of Exeter must meet the following eligibility criteria:

1. **Academic Position:** Supervisors must hold an academic appointment that qualifies them to supervise PhD students at their respective institutions.
2. **Research Expertise:** Supervisors should have a strong research track record in the relevant field, with demonstrated expertise aligning with the proposed project's objectives and one of the UQ-Exeter Institute themes.
3. **Supervision Capacity:** Supervisors must have sufficient capacity to take on a new PhD student and actively contribute to the joint supervision arrangement, including ensuring adequate support during the student's residency at the partner institution.
4. **Commitment to Collaboration:** Supervisors must demonstrate a commitment to fostering collaboration between the institutions, including regular communication and joint decision-making with their counterpart.

5. **Resource Availability:** Supervisors should confirm access to the necessary facilities, funding, and resources to support the proposed project and the candidate during their residency at their institution.

Project size and scope

Proposed projects must be designed to align with the scope and duration of the UQ-Exeter Institute joint PhD program, ensuring they are both feasible and impactful within the 3.5-year timeframe. Key considerations include:

1. **Achievability:** The project must be appropriately scoped to enable completion within 3.5 years of full-time study, factoring in the candidate's time spent on training, data collection, analysis, and thesis writing.
2. **Residency Requirement:** Each project must include a structured 12-month residency at the partner institution, either as 2 separate 6-month blocks or one continuous 12-month period. This residency is essential to provide candidates with access to complementary resources, facilities, and expertise at the partner institution, while also facilitating meaningful collaboration between the supervisory teams.
3. **Interdisciplinary Focus:** Projects should leverage the strengths of both institutions and align with one of the UQ-Exeter Institute's interdisciplinary themes, ensuring the research addresses global challenges while maximising institutional resources and expertise.
4. **Impact and Innovation:** The project should be ambitious yet realistic, aiming to contribute innovative solutions and generate significant academic, societal, or environmental impact within the defined scope and duration.

Project shortlisting criteria

All applications will be jointly reviewed and assessed by the UQ-Exeter Institute Strategy Board. Theme Leads will select the 2 strongest projects in their theme at each institution to be advertised.

The criteria used to assess the projects are:

- **Project Strength (/5):** Interdisciplinarity, originality, and innovativeness of the project's aims, methods, and scholarly significance.
- **Project Support (/5):** Availability of appropriate funding, space, infrastructure, and essential resources to support successful project delivery.
- **Impact and Translation (/5):** Potential academic, societal, economic, environmental, policy, educational, and health impacts, including opportunities for translation, commercialisation, or intellectual property.
- **Joint Program Benefits and Supervision Strategy (/5):** Clarity and coherence of the joint supervision approach, including the PhD plan, time at each institution, program activities and locations, how the advisory team will work together, and the added value of the UQ-Exeter Institute collaboration.
- **Alignment with Research Environment (/5):** Fit with UQ-Exeter Institute research strengths and institutional strategies, including demonstrated support for inclusivity and diversity within the research environment.
- **External Support (/5):** Evidence of industry or government engagement, secured funding, in-kind contributions, and support for placements or external research engagement.

High-quality proposals that satisfy all other assessment criteria and are also able to demonstrate third-party match funding (up to a maximum of 50%) will be given priority in the shortlisting and final selection process.

Based upon past experience, we expect this to be a highly competitive call, and so it is important that all criteria are addressed in your proposal to ensure the best chance of success.

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Candidate recruitment and selection

Once projects have been shortlisted and approved, the recruitment process for PhD candidates will follow the steps below. Project leads are responsible for overseeing this process in collaboration with their counterparts at the partner institution. All materials and forms will be provided to assist with this process.

Advertisement of projects

Shortlisted projects will be advertised across both The University of Queensland and the University of Exeter using institutional platforms and external channels. The advertisement will include:

- Project description and objectives.
- Supervisory team details.
- Application requirements and deadlines.
- Information about the UQ-Exeter Institute and the joint PhD program.

Candidate applications

Candidates will submit a complete application package including:

1. Supporting documents (CV, academic transcripts, referee details, etc.)
2. A personal statement addressing the following questions (maximum 200 words per response):
 - a. Describe the project and why you are a good fit.
 - b. Explain why you have chosen this research team and the UQ-Exeter Institute.
 - c. Discuss how the project aligns with your long-term career aspirations.
 - d. Describe any challenges or obstacles faced in your academic and professional journey.

We strongly encourage applications from individuals of diverse backgrounds, including those from underrepresented groups in academia, to foster a more inclusive research environment.

Note that applicants must meet the PhD entry requirements for both the University of Exeter and The University of Queensland. Applicants must also demonstrate that they can meet administrative requirements, including securing the appropriate visas and health insurance, for residency at both institutions.

Shortlisting of applicants

Project leads will assess and rank applications based on the following criteria:

- Potential and Aptitude for Doctoral Study: Academic achievements and research experience.
- Suitability for the Project: Alignment with project objectives and required skills.
- Collaborative Skills: Ability to work across teams and institutions, with an understanding of the UQ-Exeter Institute.
- Motivation and Alignment: Enthusiasm for the project and alignment with long-term career goals.

Project leads complete the Shortlisting Form to rank applicants based on these criteria and shortlist candidates for interviews. It is recommended to shortlist 3–5 candidates for interviews, focusing on those most suited to the project.

Interviews

Shortlisted applicants will participate in online interviews conducted by a panel that includes project leads from both UQ and Exeter. If a project lead cannot attend, a Theme Lead or relevant representative (DPGR or DHDR) must join to ensure impartial evaluation.

Suggested Interview Structure

- 5 minutes: Applicant's prepared pitch presentation that addresses the interview questions contained in the Interview Format & Questions document. It is recommended to ask these questions during the interview if the applicant's pitch does not adequately address them.
- 15 minutes: Questions by interviewers.
- 5 minutes: Applicant's questions.
- 5 minutes: Buffer time.

Interviewers will score candidates using the Interview Evaluation Form.

Selection of Candidates

After interviews, project leads must select:

- A first-choice candidate.
- A reserve candidate (if applicable).

Project leads must submit a Supporting Statement (200–300 words) for each selected candidate, justifying their ranking with references to both the initial application and interview performance.

Cross-Institutional Selection Panel

The final selection will be made by a cross-institutional panel comprising Theme Leads and representatives from the UQ Graduate School and the Exeter Doctoral College. Panel members will evaluate shortlisted applicants based on:

- Application package.
- Shortlisting and interview evaluations.
- Supporting statements from project leads.

The selection panel will consider the following criteria:

1. **Academic Performance and Research Potential (/5):** Academic achievements, previous research experience, and potential for independent research.
2. **Suitability for the Project (/5):** Knowledge, skills, and alignment with the project's requirements.
3. **Collaborative Skills (/5):** Understanding of the UQ-Exeter Institute and ability to work collaboratively.
4. **Motivation and Alignment (/5):** Reasons for choosing the UQ-Exeter Institute and alignment with career goals.
5. **Performance Relative to Opportunity (/5):** Consideration of challenges faced and how these influenced achievements.

6. **Overall Fit and Readiness for a UQ-Exeter Institute joint PhD (/5):** The extent to which the applicant, project, supervisory team, and UQ-Exeter Institute environment forms a coherent and feasible doctoral pathway, including readiness for a cross-institutional studentship.

The cross-institutional panel ensures fair and unbiased assessment of shortlisted candidates, prioritising alignment with UQ-Exeter Institute themes, interdisciplinary collaboration, and institutional strengths.

Final Offer and Acceptance

Successful applicants will be informed of their selection and will have a defined period to accept their offer. Project leads will be copied on all correspondence regarding outcomes.

Reallocation of scholarships if successful applicants decline their offer

The UQ-Exeter Institute's selection policy is to award scholarships the most qualified candidates, rather than to specific projects.

- In cases where a successful applicant declines their offer, the scholarship is reallocated to the strongest remaining candidate for the 2 shortlisted projects within the relevant theme and home institution.
- This approach ensures that all scholarships are awarded on merit and that final selections remained transparent, balanced, and thematically aligned across both institutions.

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Key dates*

Date	Activity
12 January 2026	Call for proposals launched
26 February 2026 (11:59pm GMT)	Deadline for submission of proposals
27 February 2026 (9:59am AEST)	
16 March 2026	Shortlisting of submitted projects
25 March 2026	Final shortlist agreed by UQ Exeter Strategy Board
27 March 2026	Project Leads notified of outcome
30 March 2026	PhD project advertisements go live
24 April 2026 (midday)	PhD candidate application deadline
29 April 2026	Application details distributed to Project Leads
30 April – 15 May 2026	Project Leads shortlist preferred applicants
W/C 18 May 2026	Project Leads invite shortlisted applicants for interviews
W/C 25 May 2026	PhD candidate interviews
2 July 2026	Central selection panel decides successful candidates
17 July 2026	Candidates informed of the interview outcome
3 August 2026	Deadline for successful applicants to accept offer
January 2027	Cohort commences

*Dates may be subject to change.

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Feedback and resubmissions

While detailed feedback is not typically provided for each project proposal, project leads may receive general insights from their theme leads to inform future submissions. Resubmission in a future round is possible.

Since only the strongest candidate in each theme will be awarded a studentship, only one of the 2 shortlisted projects per theme from each institution will ultimately proceed. Project leads whose proposals are advertised but do not attract the strongest candidate in this round are encouraged to refine and resubmit their projects for consideration in future rounds.

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Contact

For any enquiries relating to the program please contact UQ Graduate School via the below details or visit my.uq.edu.au/information-and-services/higher-degree-research/contact

Phone: [+61 7 3346 0503](tel:+61733460503) (Monday to Friday 9am-4pm AEST) Email: graduateschool@uq.edu.au