Call for Joint PhD Projects

Cohort 9

2025 Guidelines

1. Background

The University of Queensland and the University of Exeter consider that the most complex global challenges (ranging from food, mineral, and water security, to digital disruption and societal impacts, healthy living, environmental and ecosystem health), require interdisciplinary research that spans institutions, countries and even continents. To address these challenges, the two Universities established the QUEX Institute, through which our talented researchers collaborate to bring their distinct perspectives and expertise to address global challenges.

Building on a platform of active collaboration and academic exchange, we are continuing to build capacity and jointly invest in enhancing the opportunities for our researchers to work together.

In support of this vision, and building upon seven successful years of PhD studentships, the QUEX Institute is pleased to offer **a 9th call for PhD project proposals**.

The 2025 round of the QUEX Institute Call for PhD project proposals is now open for applications. The online application portal will close on the following dates:

For Exeter project leads: **Monday, 3 March 2025 (11.59pm GMT)**
For UQ project leads: **Tuesday, 4 March 2025 (9.59am AEST)**

2. QUEX Themes

In 2025, projects will be sought from the interdisciplinary research themes of the partnership:

- **Healthy Living**
- **Global Environment Futures**
- **Digital Worlds and Disruptive Technologies**
- **Mineral Security and Sustainability**

A short overview of each of the themes is provided below:

Healthy Living

Healthy people are the foundation of productive economies and stable societies. The Universities of Queensland and Exeter are both committed to the UN Sustainable Development goal of ensuring healthy lives and promoting wellbeing for all. Both institutions are world leaders in relevant fields of research, ranging across dementia, diabetes, health economics, genomics, gerontology, exercise, and nutrition. The Healthy Living theme aims to foster ground-breaking and impactful research, and translation into global health and wellbeing policy and practice. Interdisciplinary research under this theme already spans biomedical science; biophysics and engineering; health economics; mental health; health technologies; environmental epidemiology; physical activity and health policy.

Global Environmental Futures

Exploring new frontiers, finding solutions to intractable problems, and influencing public policy, are at the heart of the QUEX program on Global Environmental Futures. The Universities of Exeter and Queensland are both world leading in environmental research, delivering breakthroughs across many environmental challenges such as: climate change, clean energy, marine, coastal and reef science, biodiversity, air and water pollution, antimicrobial resistance, food security and sustainable agriculture. Opportunities for the QUEX partnership to deliver impactful research on environmental futures include the sustainable management of natural resources, understanding weather systems, improving the resilience of climate-vulnerable communities, promoting effective environmental governance, and examining the agency of social movements committed to tackling future threats. Themes should closely aligned with the relevant UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Digital Worlds and Disruptive Technologies

Novel disruptive technologies, such as generative AI and autonomous electric vehicles and the broader move towards digitalisation, are reshaping how we live, work, and connect. Digital technologies offer unprecedented possibilities while posing significant challenges. Innovations such as remote medical procedures, virtual education across continents, and technologies enabling carbon-neutral societies are disrupting industries and raising critical questions about the future of work, security, and governance. As society increasingly relies on these technologies, ensuring they are safe, secure, fair, and reliable becomes paramount. Advances in this theme involves research drawing on fields in computer science, social science, and the arts and humanities. Through interdisciplinary research in areas such as cyber security, human-centred design and data science, we can address the complexities of this digital evolution and harness its potential for a better future.

Mineral Security and Sustainability

Mineral security is said to exist when all people have sufficient and affordable access to the minerals necessary for human development.

Minerals provide the bricks and concrete for our shelter, the mineral fertilisers fundamental for agriculture, the copper that enables global communication, the lithium that is fuelling the renewable energy transition, and the gravel and stone that builds bridges and paves rural roads. However, there are major challenges in the supply of minerals and the environmental and social consequences of their extraction, processing, and use, which demand innovation and practice change.

Further, minerals are currently the only natural resource not featured explicitly in the Sustainable Development Goals. A potential outcome of research undertaken in this theme is greater international recognition and understanding for how minerals can meaningfully contribute to human development, whilst supporting and enabling the SDG targets.

The Universities of Exeter and UQ are both world-leading in environmental science, delivering research breakthroughs across many challenges such as:

- development minerals
- mineral and energy security
- decarbonisation

The Mineral Security and Sustainability theme will address global sustainability challenges in the discovery, supply and use of mineral resources. Research will advance fundamental science as well as global practice change for impact.

3. Studentships, funding, and fees

The QUEX 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 those selected (as outlined below) and will match-fund industry / third-party funding (up to 50%) for up to 2 PhD studentships.

- **For Queensland researcher project leads:** Research Partnerships Managers (RPMs) will be able to support you in exploring third-party funding if you have already identified an industry / third-party partner.

- **For Exeter research project leads:** If you're interested in exploring industry / third-party funding, please contact Exeter Innovation for advice.

	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 £19,795 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 $36,400 per annum tax free (2025 rate), indexed annually, for up to 3.5 years plus overseas Student Health Cover (OSHC).
Research training & travel funding*	RTSG up to £10,715 over the duration of the scholarship for research consumables, workshops, training courses. 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.	Research related costs fully covered by UQ advisory team and/or local enrolling unit. 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 ninth cohort will begin their program in **January 2026**. In total, **8 PhD studentships** will be awarded for the January 2026 intake, with 1 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 required to spend at least **12 months** at the partner (host) institution. This arrangement ensures they 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 two 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 / Travel & Development allowance while students are travelling

For Exeter-homed candidates, the total 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.**

Please note: 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.

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 $365 in 2025). 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 QUEX 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.

4. Project Proposals and Shortlisting

PhD project proposals will be accepted from **sets** of researchers based across the academic communities of the Universities of Exeter and Queensland. Prospective supervisors will need to complete the online PhD project proposal form in partnership with their supervisory counterparts at the partner institution.

The **nominated lead supervisor** should submit their joint project proposal via the [online PhD projects proposal form](#) **before the closing date of:**

For Exeter project leads: **Monday, 3 March 2025 (11.59pm GMT)**
For UQ project leads: **Tuesday, 4 March 2025 (9.59am AEST)**

Supervisor Eligibility

To ensure the success of joint PhD projects, supervisors from both the University of Queensland (UQ) 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 (e.g., tenured or tenure-track faculty, or equivalent roles) for the duration of the proposed project.
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 QUEX 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 & 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 QUEX 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 two 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 QUEX 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 QUEX Institute Board.

Theme Leads will select the **two 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 in aims, methods, and significance.

- **Project Support (/5):** Adequate access to funding, space, and essential resources.

- **Impact and Translation (/5):** Academic, societal, economic, environmental, policy, educational, and health impacts; including potential for translation, commercialisation, or patents.

- **Joint Program Benefits (/5):** Leveraging the unique capabilities and resources from each institution; student and project benefits, and prospects for future cross-institutional collaborations to secure external funding.

- **Alignment with Research Environment (/5):** Fit with QUEX research strengths and university strategies; including support for inclusivity and diversity.

- **External Support (/5):** Industry/government partnerships, secured funding, in-kind contributions, and support for placements.

Please note that in this round, 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.

5. 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 QUEX Institute and the joint PhD program.

Candidate Applications

Candidates will submit a complete application package including:

- A current CV
- Academic transcripts
- References
- 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 QUEX Institute.
    c. Discuss how the project aligns with your long-term career aspirations.
    d. Describe any challenges or obstacles you have faced in your academic or professional journey.
- A five-minute video pitch outlining their motivation and suitability for the project.

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 QUEX Institute.
- **Motivation and Alignment:** Enthusiasm for the project and alignment with long-term career goals.

Project leads must use the **Supervisor Shortlisting Form** to document their assessments and rank applicants. 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.

Interview Structure

- **5 minutes:** Applicant presents their prepared video pitch.
- **15 minutes:** Panel asks targeted questions assessing suitability for the project; collaborative skills and understanding of the QUEX Institute; research potential and performance relative to opportunity; motivation and alignment with project goals.
- **5 minutes:** Applicant asks questions of the panel.
- **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)
2. Suitability for the Project (/5)
3. Collaborative Skills (/5)
4. Motivation and Alignment (/5)
5. Performance Relative to Opportunity (/5)
6. Project Impact and QUEX Opportunities (/10)

The cross-institutional panel ensures fair and unbiased assessment of shortlisted candidates, prioritising alignment with QUEX 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

6. Key Dates

Date	Activity
13 January 2025	**Call for proposals launched**
3 March 2025 (11.59pm GMT)	**Deadline for submission of proposals**
17 March 2025	**Shortlisting of submitted projects**
w/c 24 March 2025	**Final shortlist agreed by QUEX Strategy Board**
w/c 31 March 2025	**Project Leads notified of outcome**
7 April 2025	**PhD project adverts go live**
8 May 2025	**PhD candidate application deadline**
9 May 2025	**Application details distributed to Project Leads**
12 - 27 May 2025	**Project Leads shortlisting preferred applicants**
w/c Monday 2 June 2025	**Project Leads invited shortlisted applicants for interviews**
w/c 9 June 2025	**PhD candidate interviews**
3 July 2025	**Central selection panel decides successful candidates**
9 - 11 July 2025	**Candidates informed of the interview outcome**
28 July 2025	**Deadline for successful applicants to accept offer**
January 2026	**Cohort 9 commence.**

7. 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 two 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.