

# Dr Jalal Bagherli PhD Studentship in Responsible AI 2025-26

Humanitarian crises are complex situations involving many actors and protection frameworks, all operating in parallel. In the midst of this are people on the move who may be exposed to risk, classified in different ways by international law, but are all affected by uses of AI technologies.

Working with UN agencies and other partners, this studentship will research responsible AI technologies in forced displacement contexts in relation to prediction, protection and the reduction of vulnerability for people on the move. The student will either work on AI Methods to detect and **predict forced displacement** or on **privacy protected edge computing and machine learning** to protect vulnerable people.

**Prediction of Movement.** Here the student will develop AI models for accurately predicting forced displacement that foreground the reduction of vulnerability, layering in modes of responsibility to inform human decision making on the rapid provision and targeting of humanitarian support based on real-time data gathering. Current models lack a real-time element and often use delayed or second / third hand sources that are difficult to verify, and even where relying on satellite imagery, primarily focus on estimating displaced population sizes and movements at settled destinations, leaving major gaps in understanding and predicting the dynamics of forced displacement. This work will focus on providing real-time capability by adding real-time data of people movement from into AI models, augmented by sources such as AI based detection of human rights violations from social media, novel Satellite Remote AI Sensing which leverage satellites AI vision for a macroscopic view, providing valuable context by detecting structural causes that trigger movement like environmental changes such as drought, but also signs of emerging conflicts and aiding in the early stage detection of large-scale movements triggers.

**Privacy-Enhancing AI Edge Computing.** To enable privacy and biometric protection, the studentship will research novel edge computing architectures based on state-of-the-art research, protected by homomorphic encryption systems, to enable local Machine Learning fusion on the platforms minimising the transmission of sensitive information for enhanced security and reduced vulnerability. This work will also extend deep learning fusion models into decentralised paradigm using federated learning on the

edge platforms to train models on decentralised data sources, without compromising individual data privacy or using raw data.

The successful applicant will receive a full PhD Studentship, including full tuition fee discount for three years of study, a stipend payment towards your living costs and Proficio funding towards training, conferences, and travel.

Full funding Studentship available is as outlined below.

Type of award	Funding available
Full-funding award	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Home or Overseas tuition fee waiver.</li><li>■ Living costs stipend at the UK Research and Innovation recommended level per year. The stipend amount for 2025-26 is £20,780</li></ul>

**About the School of Computer Science and Electronic Engineering (CSEE):**

CSEE <https://www.essex.ac.uk/departments/computer-science-and-electronic-engineering> ranked 6th in the UK’s REF2021 assessment of research excellence for Computer Science research power and 9th for impact. Within the CSEE, the Robotics and Embedded System (RES) research group is one of the largest and best-equipped labs. The RES research group is a founding member of several major UKRI research centres: the £42M EPSRC National Centre for Nuclear Robotics (NCNR), the ESRC Business and Local Government Data Research Centre (with the AI group) and the ESRC Human Rights Big Data Technology Project (HRBDT, with the AI Group and the University of Essex world leading Human Rights Centre - <https://www.essex.ac.uk/centres-and-institutes/human-rights>) .

**About Dr Jalal Bagherli**

Dr Bagherli spent 16 years as chief executive of Dialog Semiconductor, a specialist chip company in mixed signal connectivity and power management products for mobile and IoT devices. A University of Essex graduate, his companies have won multiple major industry awards. Amongst various other advisory positions, Dr Bagherli now Co-Chairs the UK Semiconductor Advisory Panel, for the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology.

# Terms and conditions

## Eligibility

- Receipt of the Studentship is subject to applying for PhD Computer science or PhD Electronic Systems. You will need to register as a postgraduate student at the University of Essex for the 2025-26 academic year on a PhD commencing in October 2025 or mutually agreed shortly thereafter, and meeting all conditions of our offer.
- Students must have achieved an honours degree (1<sup>st</sup> class, or equivalent). A Masters in a relevant subject is desirable (but not essential) and substantive previous professional experience in the relevant area can be counted towards this requirement.
- While this studentship is open to all applicants, we in particular encourage applications from female candidates and / or students from less privileged backgrounds from the developing countries in the Middle East, the Americas and Africa.
- If English is not your first language, you will also need to meet the English language entry requirements for the PhD you have applied for.
- This Studentship is available for **three** years of study.
- These Studentships are restricted to students who would otherwise be entirely self-funded.
- The award cannot be held in conjunction with any other University of Essex Studentships or scholarships.
- Successful applicants should be available for promotional activities.

\*Students receiving a repayable loan to fund their studies will be considered as self-funded.

## Students who are not eligible

The following students are NOT eligible for this Studentship regardless of meeting the above criteria:

- This Studentship award does not apply to deferred entry. Where a Studentship has been awarded to a student who subsequently defers entry to the following academic year, the award will be withdrawn and the applicant will be considered again in line with the terms and conditions that apply in the new proposed year of entry.
- Students who are fully or partly sponsored.

- Students on a 4-year integrated PhD course.

## How to apply

Application closing date: **23<sup>rd</sup> May 2025**. You can apply for this postgraduate research opportunity [online](#). Applicants should select full-time 'PhD in Computer Science Oct 25' when applying and (when asked for your 'proposed research topic or area of research') state the studentship title at the top of this advert. Applications MUST include the following documents to be uploaded:

- Research proposal of no more than 2 pages (Font 11, Single line spacing), outlining suggested research focus(es), approach(es) and/or studies that applicants would be interested to include within this PhD.
- CV including research experience, skills, and publications (if any).
- Link to a repository (e.g. Github) that evidences your coding project experience.
- Covering letter outlining how you meet the criteria for the studentship.
- Transcripts of any undergraduate or masters' programmes.

## Payment arrangements

- The tuition fee discount as part of this Studentship will be made available as a reduction on the tuition fee that is payable on registration at the University. Payment cannot be offset against a tuition fee deposit if one is required.
- If you intermit from your course, you may, at the discretion of the University, be entitled to a pro-rata payment of the remainder of your award on your return to study. Please contact the [Funding Team](#) for further information.
- This Studentship is awarded for each year of study for a period of three years. The fee element will be deducted automatically, and the stipend will be paid in quarterly instalments in October, January, April and July.
- Awards are granted for one year in the first instance but will be renewed, subject to the award holder's satisfactory progress (as defined by the Code of Practice: Postgraduate Research Degrees), for a second and third year – up to a maximum tenure of nine terms or three years, provided the award holder is still engaged in full-time research (and excepting the circumstances stated in the section on termination).

- Where progress is satisfactory, renewal of the award is automatic. Students who wish to extend their period of study beyond the nine terms will have to meet the additional costs themselves.

## **Studentship suspension**

Students must be registered and meet the above conditions to receive payment. The Studentship will be suspended during a period of approved leave of absence (intermission) where this period covers a whole or part of an academic year and may be reinstated on your return to full-time study subject to the conditions above. On your return to study, you will be entitled to the balance of the Studentship for the stage. There will be no payment for repeat periods of study in any circumstances.

## **Holiday**

Studentship holders are entitled to a maximum of eight weeks' holiday (including bank holidays and the University closure at Christmas) per annum and pro-rata. Holidays should be agreed in advance with the supervisor and, in cases where the awardee is engaged in teaching and demonstrating, with the approval of the head of the student's department, school or centre.

## **Termination of Studentship**

The University will terminate a Studentship when progress or performance is deemed to be unsatisfactory. The Studentship will be terminated if a student ceases to be registered as a student with the University, or for good cause at the discretion of our Dean of Postgraduate Research & Education, or their nominee for this purpose.

If a Studentship is terminated prematurely for any reason, an awardee must repay to the University any monies including maintenance, travel, subsistence, fees overpaid from the date of the termination of the Studentship. If an awardee submits his/her thesis before the end of the Studentship, the Studentship will be terminated on the date of submission. If an awardee takes up full-time employment whilst in receipt of a Studentship, the Studentship will be terminated as of the first day of employment.

## **Transferability**

Due to the nature of the funding, a change of course may result in the termination of the Studentship. Please refer to your supervisor in the first instance. The student is required to continue working on the specified projects to continue receiving the Studentship.

## Data Privacy Statement

The University of Essex takes confidentiality very seriously, your application form will only be seen by members of staff involved in processing your application. Information is kept in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) as it applies in the UK, tailored by the Data Protection Act 2018. Personal data will be used solely for statistical purposes and electronic record keeping and may be made available to authorised University staff to allow statistical information to be analysed.

This data will not be passed to any other third party without your consent, except when the University is required to do so by law. Any formal enquiries concerning the use of data noted here should be addressed to the Head of Student Services.

## Resolution of disputes

Acceptance of this award constitutes acceptance of these terms and conditions. Registered students should contact the [Funding Team](#) in the first instance for guidance regarding this award. In cases not covered by the above terms and conditions, or where a student claims exceptional circumstances, or disputes a decision not to make payments due under an award, final appeals on decisions regarding eligibility must be made via the [Student Complaints process](#). The Academic Registrar or their nominee will review the case and his/her decision will be final.

*These terms and conditions apply to the academic year 2025-26. The University of Essex reserves the right to update these terms and conditions as necessary.*