

SWBio DTP FAQs

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Studentships

What is a DTP studentship?

BBSRC allocates PhD studentships to [Doctoral Training Partnerships](#) (DTPs), with DTPs awarded following a competitive application procedure. The DTP proposal outlines how the DTP will deliver PhD training, and DTP students have to undertake this training as part of their PhD studies. The DTP proposal is otherwise referred to as a Portfolio Agreement, which we as the DTP have a contractual obligation to deliver. If we do not deliver this, then future studentship funding will be jeopardised (even well-established DTPs have failed to be renewed).

The SWBio DTP includes core partners (universities of Bath, Bristol (lead), Cardiff and Exeter, and Rothamsted Research) and new associate partners (Marine Biological Association (MBA), Plymouth Marine Laboratory (PML), SETSquared Bristol, Swansea University, UCB and University of the West of England (UWE))

How many studentships are available?

There are ~35 studentships available per year:

Studentship pools

There are 3 pools of studentships available:

1. **Standard studentships:** Up to 24 studentships per annum, institutional allocation
2. **Standard studentships with associate partner:** Up to 4 studentships per annum, allocated by open competition across the partnership
3. **CASE studentships:** Up to 6 studentships per annum, allocated by open competition across the partnership

These follow the same recruitment cycle and process, with similar criteria used to select projects and candidates.

Supervisors can be listed as the main supervisor (or Rothamsted and lead supervisors respectively) only once within each of these pools.

Of note, the standard studentship pool can be the most competitive studentship pool within the DTP.

Please refer to the [Overview of the different types of DTP studentships](#) for further information and eligibility of the DTP partners.

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Can I recruit an international student?

UKRI have recently introduced a policy by which DTPs can accept **up to** 30% international students per annum. These studentships are not ring-fenced for international students and are awarded competitively across the partnership to the best quality candidates.

[Further information about residence criteria >>](#)

Please discuss further with your institutional postgraduate administrator if eligibility guidance is needed. Of note, EU students will now be considered as international students if they do not meet the residence criteria.

How can students be funded outside of the DTP?

Options are:

- International government scholarship schemes
- Institutional scholarship schemes
- Self-funding by the student
- Alternatively, students could be part-funded by the government and the host institution.

Note: Studentships need to be funded to the same level as BBSRC DTP studentships (refer to the [finance section](#) within this document).

Applicants that will be funded outside of the DTP can apply during the standard recruitment process, however, we are aware that government scholarships schemes may operate outside of this schedule. In response, following the application deadline, unfilled projects will remain open for external-funded/self-funded applicants (only) to apply to. Alternatively, applicants may approach prospective supervisors to discuss new projects.

Note: New projects will still need to be approved by the DTP Management Group and candidates will follow the same 2-stage selection process (i.e. to be interviewed by a DTP interview panel).

[Further information about external-funded applicants >>](#)

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CASE studentships

What are the requirements of a CASE partner?

Note: these requirements differ between the Research Councils and for these studentships, BBSRC criteria needs to be met.

1. For all non-academic (CASE) partners, **all costs associated with the placement must be met**. Non-academic partners must support all expenses associated with the work carried out by the student while on placement, including additional expenses (such as travel and accommodation) incurred by the student as a direct result of attendance at the premises of a company. This includes the cost of flights in the case of overseas companies.
2. For companies who have **more than 50 employees** (including employees in parent companies or subsidiaries), the mandatory requirement for financial contribution is an annual cash contribution to the academic partner of **at least £1400 per annum**.
3. For companies who have **50 or fewer employees** (including employees in parent companies and subsidiaries), there is no mandatory requirement to contribute to the academic partner costs.
4. The **minimum** student placement length is **three months**, and up to a **maximum of 18 months**. The required placement period can be accrued through a number of shorter placements, if appropriate.
5. There is no longer a requirement to enhance the student stipend for any CASE Studentship.

For non-academic partners that are not companies, such as a public funded bodies or charities, BBSRC encourage contributions to the academic partner.

These contributions need to be captured in a letter of support as part of your application. Please refer to [What to include in your CASE letter of support](#) for further guidance.

Please refer to the [BBSRC CASE FAQs](#) and [BBSRC CASE information pack](#) for further guidance.

Is it possible to introduce a CASE partner at a later stage of the project?

Yes, it is possible to convert a Standard studentship to a CASE studentship, but this would still require approval by the DTP.

[Further information and forms to complete for change requests >>](#)

Do CASE students have to undertake the taught first year?

As the students will be part of the DTP, they will undertake the taught first year (but one of the rotation projects could be undertaken with the CASE partner). Please ensure your CASE partner is fully aware of this compulsory teaching commitment.

Note: If the student undertakes a rotation project with the CASE partner, this would be viewed as part of their placement and subsequently all costs associated with the rotation project will need to be met by the CASEpartner.

Do CASE students have to do a PIPS?

No, this is optional.

What are the Intellectual Property (IP) rights for a CASE studentship?

A bespoke SWBio DTP CASE Studentship Agreement is to be used for all DTP CASE studentships across the partnership.

Please refer to the [Overview of the SWBio DTP CASE Studentship Agreement](#) for an overview of what this agreement contains, including IP rights.

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Standard studentships with associate partner

What are these studentships?

These involve creating projects in full collaboration with the associate partners, where the two lead supervisors will be one from our core partners, and one from our associate partners.

We are expecting students to spend approximately 50% of their time at each partner institution with the respective listed lead supervisor. This will be made clear to applicants upon application and you will be asked how this time will be allocated over the 4 years as part of your project pro-forma. Please do take into consideration the student's living arrangements when making these plans.

There will be two recognised lead supervisors listed (one from each partner), with main supervisor responsibilities (i.e. academic progress monitoring) being taken on by the lead supervisor at the university at which the student is registered. The university at which the student will be registered will be decided following the DTP interviews and not at the point of project advertisement. The research consumables budget will also be easily accessible by both lead supervisors regardless of where the student is registered.

These projects will be scored using similar project criteria as for our standard studentships.

For eligible Associate Partners, please refer to the [Overview of the different types of DTP studentships](#).

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Project call

How do I submit a project proposal?

Project proposals must be submitted online using the project call survey. Details will be provided when each annual project call is launched.

Once you have started your project pro-forma, you will be provided with a unique link so you can complete the document over a period of time. This will also enable you and the rest of your supervisory team/collaborators to work on this project submission collaboratively.

How many projects can I submit?

As a main supervisor (or Rothamsted and lead supervisor respectively), you can submit a maximum of one project to each of the 3 pools of studentships. You can be involved in further projects as a second supervisor.

Note: The SWBio DTP considers it usually unrealistic for a supervisor to be proactively and substantially engaged in multiple projects simultaneously and this may detract in the consideration of a project. Consideration of supporting grants may be reduced if they appear on multiple projects.

Will the research theme of the project be part of the selection criteria?

No.

I am concerned that my research may not be within BBSRC remit. How can I check?

BBSRC provide very [clear guidelines](#) on what they consider is within BBSRC remit, however, we do urge you to contact us if in doubt and we will be able to confirm. We are particularly mindful of projects that may sit within MRC or NERC remits.

Importantly, we do not expect to see the same project being submitted to another Research Council funded DTP project call. This makes it very clear that the project does not substantially fit within BBSRC remit. Please be aware that we are in regular contact with other GW4 DTPs/CDTs for project remit checks.

What do you class as interdisciplinary research?

Interdisciplinarity is the combination of two academic disciplines (e.g. molecular biology and biophysics; organismal biology and mathematical modeling; neuroscience and psychology). This can often be achieved by, for example, undertaking research within different schools/departments. You can make the case for your project being interdisciplinary within the project pro-forma.

Who needs to be part of the supervisory team?

Each project needs to have at least a main and second supervisor, with research backgrounds in different discipline (to enable an effective interdisciplinary research project).

Further supervisory requirements for the different pool of studentships can be found in the [Overview of the different types of DTP studentships document](#).

Am I eligible to be a main supervisor?

You need to:

1. meet your institutional requirements to act as a main supervisor. Of note, there are mentoring mechanisms in place to support inexperienced supervisors to enable them to act as a main supervisor.
2. have guaranteed employment for the full duration of the studentship (4 years).

Can the second supervisor be based elsewhere?

Yes but they need to be based at an institution within the partnership. Please explain on the project pro-forma how this will be achieved in practice. You will also need a second local supervisor from within the host institution.

How can I engage with the associate partners?

You are able to engage with the associate partners through the 3 studentship pools mentioned previously:

1. **Standard studentships:** Including associate partners as part of your supervisory team/as a collaborator which will provide added value to your project. The student will be primarily based at the core partner institution.
2. **Standard studentships with associate partner*:** Creating projects in full collaboration with the associate partners, where the two lead supervisors will be from one of our core partners, and one from our associate partners. Note that these studentships are funded from a different pool to the standard studentships.
3. **CASE studentships:** Including an associate partner as a CASE partner or part of the supervisory team/as a collaborator. Students will be based at the lead partner institution but will spend between 3-18 months with the CASE partner.

*For eligible Associate Partners, please refer to [Overview of the different types of DTP studentships](#).

Can I bring in collaborators outside of the partnership?

Yes, and this will provide added value to a project as part of the project selection criteria.

How important is BBSRC funding?

The DTP is a BBSRC funded programme, and so it is important to the DTP to demonstrate that the student will be based in a well-founded lab (with priority given to BBSRC funded labs). To meet this criterion, the main or second supervisor would normally be expected to have BBSRC funding. Grant details will be checked during project selection.

If you have an ongoing track record of BBSRC support but currently do not have a BBSRC grant, this is acceptable but you will need to show evidence of how the student will be supported. This will typically

be details of research funding from other sources that could be used to support the studentship. Supporting non-BBSRC grants do not need to be within the BBSRC remit, although there must be a clear link with the BBSRC-remit project.

Note: Although Rothamsted is a BBSRC funded centre, it does not automatically mean that the Rothamsted supervisor has BBSRC-funding.

I am an Early Career Researcher, how do I get a DTP studentship?

As part of the project selection, there is a mechanism in place to support Early Career Researchers who are listed as the main supervisor. However, if you are not eligible to act as a main supervisor, you will need to team up with an experienced member of staff.

If I have no BBSRC funding, how can I become part of the DTP?

You can collaborate with a supervisor who does have BBSRC funding. This can be as a main or second supervisor.

Where can I secure funding to part-fund a studentship?

This is looked upon favourably and funding sources can include industry, charities and institutional funding.

How will projects be selected?

The selection criteria used to assess the projects is outlined in the project pro-forma. Projects will be selected by a project selection panel and approved by the SWBio DTP Management Group. Your institution or the DTP Hub will notify you if your project has been approved.

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Applications

How do you apply to the programme?

Applicants apply directly to the project by submitting an application via the host institution of the listed main/Rothamsted supervisor.

For standard studentships with an associate partner, this will be via the institution of the core partner lead supervisor, but this is only for administrative purposes.

What are the academic criteria for applicants?

Please refer to our [academic criteria section](#) on the website.

Importantly, we welcome applications from individuals who have previously studied at any recognised Higher Education Institute and from a range of career paths.

What happens if my nominated candidate does not have an A or B at A-level Maths?

There is a requirement for students to have at least a B at A-level Maths (or equivalent mathematical experience). This is important to ensure that students have the necessary background to pass the Statistics and Bioinformatics taught unit and to support the mathematical underpinning requirement of projects. 'Equivalent' experience could be completion of a degree with a demonstrable quantitative component (e.g. mathematics or statistics based units).

If I can put forward one nomination (and a reserve), what happens if I receive multiple excellent candidates?

We suggest liaising with other supervisors who may be interested to nominate them for their project. Please remember to discuss this option with the prospective student if this occurs.

What if I am unable to meet an applicant before the deadline for supervisor nominations?

We very strongly recommend that you meet with your applicant in person and have allowed sufficient time to allow for this. Meeting virtually is an alternative option.

Note: Candidates are expected to attend the relevant DTP interview day in person, but a virtual interview can be conducted as an alternative if this is not possible.

What are the selection criteria at the DTP interview days?

Students are assessed at interview based on their academic achievement, research potential, fit to project and performance at interview.

Useful links

- [Further information about student eligibility criteria >>](#)
- [The selection process for applicants >>](#)
- [How to apply details for applicants >>](#)

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Taught first year

Why is teaching not delivered online?

Co-localised teaching allows the cohort to develop. Training the students as a cohort is important to the BBSRC because it facilitates peer-to-peer learning, sharing of knowledge and networking. However online teaching is also used to enhance the co-localised teaching.

[Programme catalogue for the taught first year >>](#)

Is the taught component assessed?

Yes, the taught first year is assessed at Masters level with a pass mark of 50% for each unit. For students to progress into their second year, it is a requirement that they pass their taught first year.

Can a rotation project occur in another institution?

Yes it can, but please consider the logistics (such as accommodation and travel) and that there is a £1k/rotation project budget available. Please also take into consideration the student's living arrangements when making these arrangements.

If the project is refined following the first year who do I need to inform?

This will be monitored by the DTP at the end of the first year as part of the project refinement process.

However, as the rotation projects will be undertaken with two different supervisors (who are most likely to be based in different research groups), the student may decide to stay within a different research group to what was originally proposed. If there is a major change in the direction of the project or if a member of the main supervisory team changes, please alert your local Management Group representative. You will then need to submit a change request form and this will need to be approved by the SWBio DTP Management Group.

[Further information and forms to complete for change requests >>](#)

What happens if the second supervisor is based elsewhere?

If the student wishes to be based predominately with the second supervisor who is not based within the host institution, the student will need to be transferred. This may be possible within the SWBio DTP partnership but would need to be approved by the DTP, so please discuss with your local Management Group representative and complete the '[Change to main supervisory team](#)' request form.

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PIPS (Professional Internships for PhD Students)

Does the placement have to be carried out in one 3 month block?

No, it can be spread out e.g. one month every 6 months, but please consider what is best for the student. Student feedback has been that they get the most out of a placement if it is full-time in a concentrated 3 month block. How the placement is carried out may also be restricted by the PIPS host. Note: Students are expected to carry out their PIPS within years 2 or 3.

What happens if the placement exceeds the PIPS budget?

As the student will be paid a stipend throughout their PIPS by the DTP, we encourage students approach the PIPS host to request additional support. If they cannot provide additional support, the studentship fieldwork/conference budget can be used and if this is exceeded, the RTSG can be used. This is at the discretion of the supervisor.

Can a student undertake their PIPS once they have submitted?

BBSRC will not permit the financial support of students for PIPS once the thesis has been submitted, so the PIPS would need to be taken in advance of their thesis submission. We expect students to undertake their PIPS in years 2 or 3.

[Further information about PIPS >>](#)

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Finance

What is covered by the studentship?

The studentship will be funded for 4 years.

Studentships provide funding for:

- fees and stipend (URKI rate)
- RTSG (Research Training Support Grant): 1k for each of the 2 rotation projects* and £14k for years 2-4
- Fieldwork/conference/PIPS allowance: £1920 (available after year 2)

Note: This funding is linked to the successful student. If the student withdraws at any stage, the funding will be re-allocated within the DTP.

*If a rotation project is undertaken with the CASE partner, this constitutes as part of a CASE placement, and as such the CASE partner is expected to cover the placement costs.

Laptops

Each student will receive a standard specification laptop when they start the programme, paid from their RTSG. Upgrades are optional (with justification) but will also need to be met by the RTSG.

How do I get further funding to support *in vivo* work?

There is an opportunity to apply for further funding to support advanced *in vivo* work. A project call for these awards will open April/May of each year. These funds are to support the main PhD project and are **not** to be used to support the rotation projects.

What happens if I do not use all of the budget allocated for the rotation projects?

These funds can be rolled over into the following years, but funds cannot be brought forward.

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Other

What is SysMIC?

SysMIC is a BBSRC supported online course in systems biology aimed at researchers in the biological sciences. The course provides introductory and advanced training in maths and computing based around biological examples. Participants will gain an understanding of programming MATLAB to model and simulate biological systems, and the R package to run statistical analysis of results.

Note: This course is optional and costs need to be met from the student's RTSG (~£850).

Are part-time students accepted?

The programme is open to part-time students under exceptional circumstances, but this is dependent on the project and also on the student being able to complete the taught component (which operates in short intensive teaching blocks, spread sporadically throughout the year). If the length of the studentship extends past the end date of the training grant (this is a cash and time-limited grant), an agreement will need to be reached with the student's host institution to underwrite the studentship's costs.

What happens if my project changes? – e.g significant change in project direction/change in main supervisory team/addition of a CASE partner

You will need to submit a request for this change to the Management Group for approval. Please ensure you liaise with your institutional Management Group representative before you submit the form.

[Further information and forms to complete for change requests >>](#)

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