Overview

The ACCE DTP2 programme is the new iteration of the ACCE DTP, with the lead partner switching from University of Sheffield (DTP1, 2014-2018) to University of Liverpool (DTP2, 2019-2023), funded by NERC. Partners for DTP2 are University of Sheffield, University of York, UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology (CEH) and the Natural History Museum, London (NHM).

All ACCE studentships must fit within the broad remit of focusing on living component (biology) of the environment.

Funding details

The consortium has funding for a notional number of studentships per year (14 full time equivalents – FTEs - in 2019/20); the allocation of studentships the DTP will receive will be confirmed on an annual basis. NERC funding is flexible in that it allows a varied number of studentships, as long as the minimum number of notional students is supported. Students are often 50:50 (NERC and University) match funded. Other funding models are possible (e.g., involving CASE or other collaborative partners), although fully-funded students should be at least 50% NERC funded to be counted as a NERC student.

Students are usually funded for 3.5 years, with a hard deadline of 4 years, by which time all full-time students have to submit their thesis. NERC expects that projects will be designed to be achievable within the funded period.

Proposals and recruitment of students

Studentship proposals are requested by September each year for the following year’s cohort (i.e. September 2020 for the 2021/22 intake). A sift of all proposals is carried out following the submission deadline, to ensure proposals fit to the ACCE remit, and to manage numbers up to an agreed limit for advertising. Only one project proposal can be made per lead supervisor. In addition, if a supervisor is successful as a lead supervisor one year, a project should not be submitted with the supervisor as lead supervisor the following year (one supervisor should not have more than three ACCE students within the five year life of the DTP).

Supervisors should nominate up to two candidates to go forward to interview, which take place in February each year. The final selection of candidates to interview will then be decided from those nominated. All sift, selection, and interview criteria will be made available at each stage of the process.

The offer letter process is handled locally by each institute/school, or partner institution.
Stipend, fees and research training support grant

Student stipends are paid at the UKRI National Minimum Doctoral Stipend rate. For 2019/20 this is £15,009 (see https://www.ukri.org/skills/funding-for-research-training/). The RCUK Indicative Fee Level for 2019/20 is £4,327.

Research Training Support Grant (RTSG). The RTSG for students is set at £11,000 per student for the lifetime of the PhD. Please note that £2,800 of this amount is top-sliced and retained by the DTP to fund training activities, therefore the overall amount available for student expenditure is £8,200.

The supervisor will be the signee for all purchases for their student, and should ensure NERC funds are spent according to the funder requirements (more details on allowable RTSG expenditure are available in the student handbook). If studentships are co-funded by their own department or another organisation (such as CASE studentships), it is possible that there are different constraints on how the co-funding is spent. Note that, over the course of the PhD, at least half of the student’s funding (for a full award) should come from NERC (see above) – so be careful not to spend more funds from the co-funder than from NERC. Please also note that, while the supervisor is the signatory on the grant, these funds can only be used for work relating to that PhD studentship, and the student should be informed of all expenditure.

Training Needs

Each student needs to complete a Training Needs Analysis (TNA, sometimes called Development Needs Analysis) with their supervisor, at least once per year and revisited as necessary. This will normally be part of the student’s standard progression processes at the host institution, but it is the supervisor’s responsibility to make sure it happens. It is also important that the student is aware that the TNA/DNA has taken place, because NERC will ask students about this, so supervisors should emphasise to their students that this has occurred.

Placements and extensions

Placements and extensions to PhD funding: please familiarise yourself with these by reading the student handbook. The DTP team and lead academic at the relevant institution will be able to advise further.

Cohort activities and peer-to-peer support

Supervisors should ensure each student has a lab buddy at a partner institution. This can be a student of a co-supervisor at another university. Buddying should be initiated at the Annual Meeting or at another time within the first month of the studentship, and buddy names should be forwarded to the DTP Manager (see contact details below).

Main supervisors are expected to attend at least one day of the ACCE Annual Conference, held in October. You will be able to claim for travel expenses for this event from your student’s RTSG funds.

Your student must attend the compulsory ACCE cohort training events, which mostly take place during their first year. Dates are given on the ACCE website and we’d appreciate your help in ensuring your student does not schedule anything that clashes with them. If it’s unavoidable that essential field or experimental work clashes with a course at the first opportunity, the student must book on to the course in a subsequent year.
Collaboration with non-academic partners

ACCE has a number of initiatives to deepen engagement with non-academic partners, including ‘Highlight topic’ PhDs and CASE PhDs. For more information about these, see the ACCE partnerships guide (forthcoming) or email accepartners@sheffield.ac.uk.

For CASE studentships, make sure you are aware of the CASE partner’s financial responsibilities, and the requirements for the student to spend time with the partner. You should sign a collaboration agreement with your partner, administered by the legal team at your institution. More details are available in the student handbook, and at the NERC UKRI website:
https://nerc.ukri.org/funding/available/postgrad/focused/industrial-case/

Reporting to NERC

You may be asked by the ACCE DTP team to provide information for reporting to NERC (normally information is requested to be sent to the ACCE DTP team). NERC have specific guidance and deadlines for information they require. The DTP team will keep you informed about upcoming deadlines and requests for information, and will be able to help out with any queries. We ask that requests for information are dealt with in a timely fashion.

One key information request that needs to be completed by the end of October each year is the submission of student details to Je-S for each student starting that year. Forms are distributed to all supervisors during September and should be returned to the DTP team by the stated deadline (in mid-October). The DTP director reviews all submission details before they are uploaded to Je-S.

Key contacts

DTP director
Professor Andy Fenton – a.fenton@liverpool.ac.uk

Institutional leads
University of Liverpool: Dr Stephen Cornell – scornell@liverpool.ac.uk
University of Sheffield: Dr Gavin Thomas – gavin.thomas@sheffield.ac.uk
University of York: Professor Lisa Emberson – l.emberson@york.ac.uk
Natural History Museum: Eileen Cox – e.cox@nhm.ac.uk
CEH: Kate Searle – katre@ceh.ac.uk

Liverpool DTP team
Carolyn O’Leary, ACCE DTP Manager
Emma Robertson, ACCE DTP Deputy Manager
John Donnelly, Finance and Research Co-ordinator

To contact the DTP team, email: acce.dtp@liverpool.ac.uk or call 0151 795 1227

Useful links

ACCE DTP website – https://acce.shef.ac.uk/
Twitter account - @ACCE_DTP
NERC website - https://nerc.ukri.org/
NERC DTP guidance and FAQs - https://nerc.ukri.org/funding/available/postgrad/responsive/dtp/dtp2/