

ACCE DTP studentship project proposal ranking criteria

ACCE expects to receive 14 studentships per year from NERC. With additional institutional support from Liverpool (4 studentships), Sheffield, and York (2 studentships each) at least 22 studentships per year will be available across the five ACCE partners (Liverpool, Sheffield, York, CEH, NHM). The number of potential projects greatly exceeds the number of available studentships and project proposals are subject to a review stage prior to advertising. We anticipate advertising 50-60 studentships across the consortium per year. Before submitting a proposal, please review the criteria below, against which all projects will be ranked.

Questions about project proposals should be sent to stephen.cornell@liverpool.ac.uk.

Ranking criteria

1. Fit to ACCE: all projects must align closely to one or more of the four ACCE research themes (detailed at the end of this document). In particular, projects should emphasise the core ACCE focus of the ***biological component of the natural environment***. ***Projects that do not fit closely to the ACCE remit will not be advertised.***

2. ACCE track record: ACCE studentships cannot be held by the same lead supervisor in consecutive years, unless one of the projects is CASE e.g. successful lead supervisors in year 1 cannot propose a project as a lead supervisor until year 3 (but can be co-supervisor), unless projects are CASE. In other words, a maximum of 3 non-CASE studentships can be held as lead supervisor over the 5-year duration of the new ACCE programme.

3. Fit to budget: ACCE studentships will receive a total Research Training and Support Grant (RTSG) of ~£8200. Only projects that can be completed within this budget, or where sufficient additional research funding has been secured, will be considered.

4. Confirmed CASE funding: NERC requires that a minimum of 25% of ACCE funded projects are CASE funded and ACCE has further committed to 40% CASE or collaborative partners in the next 5 years. NERC requirements for CASE funding are outlined here: <https://nerc.ukri.org/funding/available/postgrad/focused/industrial-case/>. Confirmation from the CASE partner (e.g. a letter or email correspondence) should be provided.

5. Confirmed co-funding: Co-funding is a commitment from a partner organisation to provide 33-50% of the total costs of the studentship, i.e. fees, full RTSG, stipend. We recognise that ACCE deadlines do not always fit with the co-funding timelines of partner organisations. If you have secured, or have potential co-funding please inform your local ACCE lead at the earliest opportunity.

6. NERC funding track record: the funding that ACCE receives from NERC was secured partly on the basis of the excellent track record of NERC funding across the five partner institutions (University of Sheffield, University of Liverpool, University of York, NHM, CEH). Projects proposed by a lead supervisor with a recent track record of NERC funding (grants/fellowships awarded in the last 5 years as PI or co-I) will be favoured over those with no recent NERC funding and those as PI will be weighted more strongly than those as co-I.

7. Cross-institutional supervision: the members of the ACCE partnership have committed to cross-institutional support for at least ⅓ of studentships. Projects which span at least two ACCE institutions will, therefore, be favoured.

8. ACCE annual Highlight topic: Each year ACCE will have an annual Highlight topic, developed in collaboration with external partners. A number of studentships will be allocated to the theme to form a cohort of studentships working on a related set of impactful challenges (see further information on highlight topics below).

9. Early Career support: ACCE is committed to supporting early career researchers (e.g. independent research fellows, recently-appointed lecturers) in establishing their research groups.

10. EU Student Eligibility: UKRI funds cannot be used to fund a stipend for EU students unless they satisfy certain UK residence criteria (ordinarily resident in the UK for the three preceding years), though such students are eligible for a fees-only award (which would provide fees and research training support). However, since some of our funding comes directly from the University we are able to provide stipends for a limited number of EU students who do not satisfy these residence requirements. We are also able to fund a small number of students from outside the EU and UK. Please discuss this matter with Stephen Cornell if you are considering nominating a non-UK applicant.

ACCE core research themes as outlined in our 2018 ACCE DTP renewal application

1. Securing ecosystems and their natural capital

Developing sustainable habitats to secure ecosystem functioning and natural capital is urgently needed as global human populations and demands on environmental resources grow. We have strength in research that provides a fundamental understanding of ecosystem services and resources, and how their long-term future can be secured to guide the protection and restoration of multiple ecosystem services.

2. Predicting and mitigating impacts of environmental change

Understanding the consequences of anthropogenic environmental change underpins our ability to conserve biodiversity and ecosystem resilience. ACCE partners study the impacts of environmental change, including climate change, on populations, communities and ecosystems, with approaches ranging from physiological processes within leaves, climate modelling and paleoecology, through changes in species richness and distribution, to global carbon dynamics.

3. Understanding the dynamics of biodiversity

The mechanisms that generate and maintain global biodiversity underpin our understanding of the impacts of invasive species, climate change, and habitat loss on ecosystem function. ACCE partners develop and use theoretical models, lab populations, experimental microcosms, real-world environments, and phylogenetics to understand ecological and evolutionary dynamics across scales from single-species to interacting communities, and from generational to geological time-scales.

4. Investigating mechanisms of evolutionary change: genes to communities

Understanding how evolutionary responses to changing environments impact the structure and function of communities is a major challenge. We are international leaders at using multi-disciplinary approaches

to study evolutionary biology, investigating adaptation of species to rapid environmental change, studying fundamental drivers of genetic diversity including gene flow and horizontal gene transfer, and the genetic basis of symbiosis, competition, co-evolution and co-operation between species and organisms.

Highlight Topic

Annual “Highlight” projects are an initiative by ACCE to help to deepen engagement with partners from end-user organisations. We aim to ensure that several highlight projects will end up with funding, but students applying for these projects are interviewed just as for other projects. It is not essential for a highlight project to have CASE support, but there must be a committed co-supervisor from an end-user organisation. In the 2021/22 recruitment round we are helping supervisors and partners to co-design projects for mutual benefit, with a series of 3 short workshops linked to an online collaboration platform. Anyone registering for this “step by step partnership building” process will have access to useful collaboration materials, even if they cannot make all the live workshop times. The “idea template” will be available to fill in between 30th July and 3rd September 2020, thus at least one supervisor of a desired Highlight project must register, at minimum to gain access to the template. We hope you will also be willing to pitch your idea to others in the final workshop on 10th September, to gain useful feedback.