



Adapting to the Challenges of a Changing Environment (ACCE) DTP2 Supervisor Information Sheet 2020/21

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.

COVID19

Obviously a major concern at the moment is the potential impact Covid-19 might have on our students and on their PhD projects. Our ultimate priority has to be student health and wellbeing, and many students will have serious concerns about their ability to complete their projects, some will have ongoing mental or physical health problems that might be exacerbated by uncertainty due to covid disruptions, and some will have outside responsibilities (i.e., caring or family needs) that may limit their effectiveness at home-working etc. Please maintain regular contact with your students, particularly those undergoing prolonged periods working from home, and please let us know if you have any concerns about them. There is plenty of support at each University, and we can help direct students appropriately if needed. We also ask you to encourage students to engage as much as possible with other groups of students, both within their home Universities, but also across the wider ACCE network, to help them feel part of a larger community. Please let us know if you see any ways in which we can help facilitate that.

Finally, there is obviously huge uncertainty regarding covid, the potential for further lockdowns, and the extent of any disruptions to research projects that it may cause. As things stands, we do not envisage additional money being made available from UKRI or Universities to fund future costed extensions to PhD studentships. We therefore ask supervisors and students to seek to include potential mitigation strategies into the planning and design of their projects. As ever, please maintain communication with the ACCE Management Board, if you see any problems with a student or their project.

Funding details

The consortium has funding for a notional number of studentships per year (14 full time equivalents – FTEs - in 2020/21; which usually means we can fund a total of 22-24 studentships with match funding from the Universities); 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, a supervisor can only be lead supervisor on three non-CASE or co-funded PhD projects within the 5 years of ACCE2 (2019 – 2024 recruitment rounds). Please note that local institutional rules may supersede this criteria to allow institutions to enhance the diversity of ACCE supervisors where necessary.

Details of the project proposal call and sift criteria are available on the [ACCE website](#).

Supervisors should nominate up to two candidates to go forward to interview, which take place in February each year. Criteria for the candidate sift panel is changing slightly for 2021 as part of our continued mission to reduce barriers for underrepresented groups in recruitment. We will be assessing students on a broader range of excellence criteria to reflect the reality that excellence and dedication can come in many forms. 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 2020/21 this is £15,285 (see <https://www.ukri.org/skills/funding-for-research-training/>). The RCUK Indicative Fee Level for 2020/21 is £4,407.

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.

The ACCE DTP Finance and Research Co-ordinator can assist with any queries (acce.dtp@liverpool.ac.uk).

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 months 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/November (NB the 2020 event is being held virtually)**. 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 or email accepartners@sheffield.ac.uk. Please also see our [Partnerships pages](#) on the website.

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/>

We also enable some external organisations to become **Co-funded Partners**, whereby they contribute substantially (33-50%) towards the cost of a studentship, in return for guaranteeing that studentship to them and an academic co-supervisor. If you have connections with an organisation that might be interested in such an arrangement, please contact the ACCE DTP team (email below).

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: Dr Eileen Cox – e.cox@nhm.ac.uk

CEH: Dr Kate Searle – katrle@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

University of Sheffield DTP Administrator (Angela Hoare) – acce.dtp@sheffield.ac.uk

Useful links

ACCE DTP website – <https://acce.shef.ac.uk/>

Twitter account - @ACCE_DTP

NERC website - <https://nerc.ukri.org/>

NERC DTPs information- <https://nerc.ukri.org/funding/available/postgrad/responsive/dtp/dtp2/>

UKRI Terms and Conditions - <https://www.ukri.org/funding/information-for-award-holders/grant-terms-and-conditions/>