

Please note, as of 1 May 2014, all new NERC studentships now fall under the RCUK harmonised postgraduate terms and conditions and not the NERC studentship handbook or FAQs below. All studentships that commenced prior to 1 May 2014 still fall under the NERC handbook and FAQs below.

NERC Studentship and Doctoral Training Grant (DTG) Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) – Supervisors, Grant Holders, Student Services Officers and Finance Officers.

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1. Glossary

DTG – Doctoral Training Grant
FES – Final Expenditure Statement
GDP Deflator – Gross Domestic Product Deflator
[Je-S](#) – Joint Electronic Submission
SDP - Studentship Details Portal
RO – Research Organisation
SSC – Shared Services Centre

2. Application Procedures

Q: How are NERC studentships awarded to ROs?

A: NERC runs a number of studentship schemes. Further details can be found on our [website](#).

3. Student Eligibility

Q: I am not sure whether a studentship applicant is eligible – what do I do?

A: NERC studentship eligibility requirements are in section B of the studentship [handbook](#). If you are still unsure please discuss with your student services office or university Registrar in the first instance. Contact stag@nerc.ac.uk if still unsure.

Q: Can I take on an EU student and what funding will they be allowed?

A: EU students can not receive a maintenance grant from a NERC grant unless they have been ordinarily resident in the UK throughout the three year period preceding the start date of an award. They should be eligible for a fees-only award (which would provide fees and research training support

costs). Once an EU student has been resident in the UK for three years, they could convert to a full award during the period of the studentship.

Q: I have an applicant who has a UK passport, but their parents moved outside the EU - since then they have been in full time education. They now want to return to the UK to undertake a PhD. Are they eligible for NERC Funding?

A: They may be eligible for a NERC award if they can prove that their absence from the UK was temporary. Temporary absence is where a UK citizen has spent an extended period living outside the UK, either for study or employment. Candidates will have to show that they have maintained a relevant connection to the UK. Temporary does not depend on length of absence.

Q: My applicant has a working permit/student visa, are they eligible to apply for a studentship?

A: No. Student Visas, work permits or dependant visas have restrictions on the time spent in the UK and therefore the holders cannot demonstrate a relevant connection or settled status.

Q: I have an applicant who is an international student. Are they eligible for NERC funding?

A: A candidate must be able to prove settled status in the UK as per the [Immigration Act 1971](#). Also they must be able to prove that they have a relevant connection to the UK, which requires that they have been ordinarily resident in the UK throughout the 3 year period preceding the date of the award. NERC does not currently fund international students outside these criteria.

4. DTG Announcements and Payments

Q: When will I get the announcement letter?

A: NERC aims to inform applicants of successful studentships by the end of January. The DTG and subsequent announcement letter cannot be produced until after April (when the cross-council fees levels have been confirmed, based on the April GDP Deflator), but will be sent to the ROs via [Je-S](#) at least 2 months before the start date of the grant. The announcement letter will go to the admin office at your RO.

Q: How do I know when my grant has been started?

A: In future DTGs will be started once the start confirmation has been received by the SSC. This will trigger the first payment in the next pay run. The grant holder can also monitor the status of their grant on [Je-S](#) Status Reporting.

Q: How are the DTG payments made?

A: DTG payments are generally made quarterly in advance (research/fellowship grant payments are quarterly in arrears). There are two exceptions: the first payment will be made as soon as possible after the start

confirmation is received; and the final quarterly payment is withheld until the grant end date has been reached and the grant has been reconciled (following the return of the completed Final Expenditure Statement - FES).

Q. Why haven't I received the final payment on a DTG?

A: You will not receive the final payment until the FES has been submitted through [Je-S](#) and has been reconciled. The FES will be sent to the RO through [Je-S](#) upon the end date of the grant, with a due date of 3 months after the end date.

5. Grant Amendments

Q: How can I fund the student beyond the end date of the grant?

A: You will need to request a 'no-cost' extension to the grant. This request can be made through Je-S by selecting a 'Grant Extension Request' through 'Grant Maintenance'. A grant end date cannot be extended after it has been reached, so extension requests must be made in good time to allow for processing.

Students can also receive funding from more than one DTG, so it is possible to fund the latter part of a student's funding from a subsequent DTG, using the funding from the original DTG to fund another student. This avoids the need for a grant extension.

Q: I need to change the grant holder on my DTG. What do I do?

A: In order to change the grant holder, the current grant holder needs to submit a Grant Maintenance request via their [Je-S](#) account, of the type 'Grant Holder Change Request'. This will need to be done separately for each grant currently held by the previous grant holder.

6. Paying Students from DTGs

Q: I have a NERC-funded student who would like to attend a conference/undertake fieldwork. Will NERC pay for this?

A: The DTG paid directly to the RO includes a Research Training Support Grant (RTSG) to cover the costs of field work, consumables and conferences etc, so students should approach their supervisors to agree expenditure against the grant.

Q: How long do NERC students need to be funded for?

A: DTGs currently include 3.5 years funding per notional studentship. Students should be funded for between 3 and 4 years. The RO has flexibility in how it uses the remaining 0.5 year (fourth year) funding.

Q: Do students have to be funded from a single DTG?

A: No, students could be funded from a number of DTGs, as long as the [Je-S](#) SDP is updated to show which grants the student has received funding from.

7. Maternity, Paternity and Illness

Q: My student is going on maternity leave, what do I need to do?

A: NERC funded students are entitled to 6 months stipend as maternity pay if their maternity period starts within the funded period of their studentship. They can then have up to another 6 month unpaid leave, if required. The same entitlement applies for additional paternity or adoptive leave. They may then continue the studentship on a part-time basis (at least 50%) if required.

The [Je-S](#) SDP should be updated with the new funding end date and expected submission date (6 months or more depending on the period of unpaid leave and part time working).

Q: Can students take paternity leave?

A: A total of ten days paternity leave may be taken at any time during a partner's pregnancy or within three months following the birth. No extra funding will be provided. Students may also take up to six months additional paternity leave.

Q: My student is on sick leave, what do I need to do?

A: NERC funded students are entitled to up to 13 weeks of sick pay in any 12 month period, if they have medical certificates. NERC no longer needs to be sent medical certificates, although ROs may wish to retain copies for audit purposes. Sick periods beyond the 13 weeks should not be funded from the DTG, so the studentship should be put in abeyance.

The [Je-S](#) SDP should be updated with the new funding end date and expected submission date (based on the period of sickness and any abeyance and subsequent part time working).

Q: How do we claim back the funding for the maternity/illness payments?

A: Extra costs should be taken from the training grant, where possible. Alternatively NERC will pay any extra costs incurred for maternity or illness at reconciliation of the DTG. Any costs related to maternity or sickness should be included in the absence heading of the FES and these will be paid in the final payment.

8. Abeyance and Employment

Q: For personal/family reasons my student needs to put their studentship into abeyance. Is this possible?

A: We expect students to complete their training in a single continuous period and we do not encourage the suspension of awards (except for short policy interships or work placements). However, we acknowledge that there are times when an abeyance may be an appropriate course of action. Students should make any requests for abeyance to their supervisor and requests for abeyance due to family or personal reasons should be given sympathetic consideration. The maximum period of suspension should normally be twelve

months, and you should ensure that the studentship end dates and expected submission dates are updated on the Je-S SDP, to reflect any periods of abeyance.

Q: What do I need to do with the DTG as a result of a studentship abeyance?

A: Whilst the student is receiving maternity or sick pay, you need to do nothing. If the student is funded on a single DTG and takes an extended period of unpaid leave, the DTG holder will need to put in a [Je-S](#) grant suspension request.

Q: My student would like to do some paid work during their PhD. Is this allowed?

A: We encourage students to undertake some teaching or demonstration work, when this is compatible with their training and provided that their supervisor approves. The total time spent (including preparation and marking) should not exceed six hours in any week during term time. As the provision of teaching and demonstrating is the responsibility of your Research Organisation, students should be paid for this at the Research Organisation's usual rate and be supported by appropriate training.

Students can also undertake a small amount of other paid work, provided their supervisor gives consent and it does not delay or interfere with their research training. In both cases, students should ensure that any income is reported for tax purposes.

Q: My student would like to go on a work placement. Can they do this?

A: Students can take up to a three-month abeyance of their award to enable them to undertake a work placement that is directly related to their training or that will provide valuable transferable skills, provided that this is well justified and approved in advance by their supervisor and Research Organisation. The student's supervisor should ensure that the studentship end dates and expected submission dates are amended on the Je-S SDP to reflect any periods of abeyance.

Q: Where can I find more information about NERC Policy Internships?

A: NERC funds a number of three-month policy internships. Further information can be found on our [website](#).

Q: Can a student take a holiday during their studentship?

A: Reasonable holidays, not exceeding eight weeks in the year including public holidays, may be allowed by supervisors. Up to a maximum of four weeks holiday may be taken at the end of the period of the award.

9. Student Terminations

Q: My student has terminated, what do I need to do?

A: You should arrange for the [Je-S](#) SDP to be updated with the studentship termination date and reason.

Q: Can I replace a terminated student?

A: Yes, you can generally replace the student, especially if they terminate within the first year. If the studentship project was awarded through a competition (Open CASE, directed or project studentship), any replacement student would need to continue the same project and you would need to find the remaining funding for the studentship. If the terminated student was on a quota/algorithm studentship, you could use the remaining funds to support other NERC students, or replace the student. The new project would not need to be the same.

Q: What do I need to do with the DTG if a student terminates?

A: If the student was one of many funded via a large DTG, you should do nothing. If the student was funded on a single studentship DTG, the DTG holder should go into [Je-S](#) and put in a grant maintenance request to put the DTG into suspension until a replacement student is found. Once the new student starts, the DTG holder can go into [Je-S](#) and put in a grant resumption request. If you can not use the remaining funds to support a replacement student, then you should put in a grant termination request via [Je-S](#).

10. Student Disability

Q: My student has a disability. Can they get any additional support?

A: If their studentship is funded by NERC and they have a long term disability which results in additional expenditure in connection with their studies, they may be eligible for an extra allowance, known as a [Disabled Students' Allowance \(DSA\)](#). Students should contact the Disability Coordinator (or equivalent) at their Research Organisation for guidance on the application and assessment procedure.