

NERC Specific DTP Guidance and Frequently Asked Questions 1.6 (July 2017)



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Significant changes from previous version:

Paragraph	Change
61., 62.	Additional FAQs added
37., 46., 48.	NERC contact details updated

Definitions for the purposes of this document and the NERC DTP programme:

NERC Doctoral Training Partnerships (DTPs): DTPs are institutions or consortia offering responsive mode NERC funded PhD studentships. DTPs are outstanding clusters of excellence providing world-class PhD training and offer studentships in a range of areas from the NERC science remit.

Notional Studentships: This is the minimum number of studentships that NERC expects to be supported within each student cohort within each DTP. It is the number used to calculate the value of Doctoral Training Grants. There is not necessarily a 1:1 relationship between the number of studentships awarded and the number of students supported because of the flexibility in the funding awarded. Each NERC DTP has been awarded a set number of notional studentships and each DTP has provisionally been awarded funding to support five student cohorts.

Administrative Lead Partner: Each DTP will contain an Administrative Lead Partner. This organisation will be the main point of contact between NERC and the DTP and will receive the DTP funding awarded. This position should not be interpreted as recognition of a dominant partner which will host the majority of the studentships.

DTP Partner: A DTP partner is any organisation other than the Administrative Lead Partner that is involved with a NERC DTP.

CASE Partner: CASE Partners are a type of DTP Partner that provide individually linked doctoral students with a first-rate, challenging research training experience, within the context of a mutually beneficial research collaboration between academic and partner organisations in the private, public and civil society sectors. Non-academic partners within a DTP may act as CASE partners.

Cohort: The term cohort is used throughout this document to describe groups of students linked by a shared characteristic. The term Cohort covers a wide-ranging number of student groups but each use will be accompanied by a prefix clarifying the exact definition. Common usages and definition for this programme have been included below:

- DTP Cohort: All students within a DTP at any given time
- Annual Cohort: All students within a DTP that began their studentships within the same academic year

TGC: Where appropriate, relevant Training Grant Conditions (TGCs) and sections of the associated guidance (Section No. & Name) from these documents will be referenced within this document.

A. Announcement of Award

1. An announcement letter and payment schedule (which is available to download via Je-S) will usually be available at least two months prior to the scheduled first payment of the grant. Grant holders will be notified of additional funding streams subsequently added to the grant via notification letters (also available to download via Je-S).

B. Funding (TGC 5)

2. NERC expects DTPs to meet the costs of supporting their students from within the cash limit of their training grant. The DTP can allocate these funds flexibly and may, for example, part-fund students with other Research Councils or with partners in the public, private or civil-society sectors.
3. A new funding stream will be added to the initial doctoral training grant (DTG) for each annual cohort covering the full amount per notional studentship awarded to the DTP per annual cohort and payments will be profiled over time as per normal NERC grant practice. The first payment from each grant will be made following receipt by NERC of the starting certificate and the first payment of each subsequent funding stream will coincide with the start date of its annual student cohort. The DTG will be paid to the Administrative Lead Partner.
4. Each DTG will require a Final Expenditure Statement (FES) (**TGC 9**). The FES details expenditure incurred over the full period of the grant and must be received within three months of the end of the grant. The final payment of the grant will not be made until the FES has been received by NERC. Once the FES has been received by NERC, and expenditure incurred has been reconciled against made, the statement will be considered as final.
5. Training grant payments will be made quarterly over the four year lifespan of each annual cohort. The first payment for the first cohort will be made following receipt of the starting certificate from the DTP Administrative Lead Partner. The first payment from the additional funding streams for each subsequent annual cohort will be made in September. Payments for NERC DTGs are made in advance.

6. Funding will not be released early to support students that begin their studies at the DTP ahead of the funding start date but a student may start before the funding period with any costs incurred covered from other sources.
7. The funding provided for NERC DTPs will cover studentships for up-to four years or the part-time equivalent. The DTPs may offer studentships with shorter lifetimes than this at their discretion and taking into account the individual student's best interests, but studentships must not be shorter than three years in length.
8. Funding of £1500 is available for each notional studentship to contribute toward the management costs related to the running of each DTP. This funding will be paid in full for each cohort a minimum of two months ahead of the cohort start date and will be added to the existing DTP DTG. These Management Fees should be included in the FES for the DTG they have been added to.
9. Each DTP will last a provisional eight academic years supporting five annual intakes of 4-year studentships. Each DTG will therefore include at least five funding streams over the lifetime of the DTP. This time period spans nine of NERC's financial years.
10. If NERC are required to make adjustments to any DTP awards it will do so in a way that does not impact on the funding for individual students that have already begun their PhD training.
11. Unallocated funding remaining from a NERC DTP Training Grant can be used to assist with the administration of training (**TGC 5**). Please note, the Terms and Conditions for DTP awards have been updated online to reflect this position.
12. Information regarding the agreed RCUK minimum stipend and indicative fee rates are published annually on the [RCUK Funding for Research Training webpage](#).
13. Training grants will consist of the basic costs outlined on the website above but the funding will be indexed to allow for enough funds to cover yearly increases in the maintenance grant and fees. The indexation rate over the four years of the training grant will be informed by the most current Treasury GDP Deflators in place when preparing the award. The forecast GDP Deflators may be different from the final rate on which the cross-council maintenance grant and fees levels are based each year; the flexibility in training grant funding should be used to manage any differences.
14. For those eligible for full studentships, in order to qualify as a NERC DTP student, at least 50% of the funding for a studentship must be provided for by NERC. Students who are funded from other sources are eligible to be part of DTP activities but do not qualify as NERC students.
15. Virement between NERC DTGs is not permitted but students can be supported from multiple NERC DTGs, including those awarded pre-DTP, from any of the standard headings. DTPs should use the flexibility within their DTGs to manage funding for all their NERC funded students, avoiding the need to request no-cost extensions to individual

DTGs.

16. Virement between all headings within the main DTG is permissible (Stipend, Fees & RTSG). Please note, virement between additional fund headings such as Disabled Students Allowance, etc. is not allowed. Funding allocated under these headings must be used solely for the purpose for which it was awarded.
17. Please remember that all expenses must constitute a justifiable use of public money and may be audited over the lifetime of the DTP programme.
18. Eligible students must receive the RCUK National Minimum Doctoral Stipend appropriate for the current year of study (see [RCUK Funding for Research Training](#)).
19. London Allowance (**TGC 5 & 10. London and Other Allowances**): NERC will contact the DTPs shortly after each annual cohort begins to confirm the number of students within that cohort eligible for London Allowance. Following confirmation of this information, an additional funding stream will be added to the DTG providing these funds, which will be paid in the same manner as other DTG payments. The first payment for London allowance will be made with the second payment from the annual cohort's funding stream and NERC will provide funding to cover the amount in arrears for the first quarter with this payment. Prior to this first payment for London Allowance the DTPs are expected to use the flexibility within their training grants to cover these costs. NERC offer £2000 p.a. for London Allowance and, as this is a supplement to the stipend of NERC students, is not available to fees-only studentships.
20. To be eligible for London Allowance (**TGC5**) a student must undertake the majority of their studentship within an eligible London location, usually whilst based at a London institution. A student undertaking a temporary placement in London as part of their PhD would not be eligible for London Allowance. London Allowance will not be awarded retrospectively and additional costs incurred relating to London Allowance should be managed using the flexibilities within the training grants.
21. Research Councils UK (RCUK) Disabled Students' Allowances (DSA) are intended to help with additional expenditure for the costs of study-related requirements that may be incurred as a result of disability, mental health problem or specific learning difficulty that means additional support is needed to undertake a Research Council funded studentship. The allowances can cover the cost of non-medical personal assistance, items of specialist equipment, extra travel costs and general expenses. Research Organisations should undertake the assessment of need and provide costs for the student when they are required. Research Organisations will be able to claim back eligible costs at the end of the academic year by submitting a completed DSA claim form to the Research Councils by 31 October. Further advice and DSA forms can be found on the [RCUK Funding for Research Training webpage](#).
22. In June 2014, NERC provided each DTP with £1000 to assist with meeting attendance costs for DTP staff to attend NERC-organised DTP meetings. This funding was provided as a one-off payment un-associated with a DTP DTG and will not be recurring.

C. CASE Studentships

23. CASE studentships provide NERC doctoral students with a first-rate, challenging research training experience, within the context of a mutually beneficial research collaboration between academic and non-academic partner organisations in the private, public and civil society sectors.
24. Any and all non-academic partners within a DTP may act as CASE partners within that DTP provided they meet CASE eligibility requirements, namely:

Any non-academic organisation within the public, private or third sector that has research and/or end-user interests in NERC's remit is eligible to act as a CASE partner within a DTP. This includes private industry, the research organisations of the nationalised industries, public bodies such as regional water companies, county planning offices and public sector research establishments (PSREs). Higher Education Institutes are not eligible to act as CASE partners.

International organisations are able to act as CASE partners in some instances – DTPs are advised that to be eligible as a CASE partner, international organisations must be able to provide the student with an opportunity to gain skills that could not be provided by a UK-based partner.

25. NERC requires the CASE partner to supplement the studentship by a minimum of £1000 p.a. for a minimum of three years. For new studentships starting from 2016/17, this payment should be made to the lead Research Organisation to supplement the RTSG element of the studentship and not paid to the student directly.
26. It is mandatory that students spend a part of their training (between three and eighteen months) with the CASE partner. This placement represents an important contribution to the training of the student and should provide specific training or access to capabilities and expertise not available at the academic partner.
27. NERC does expect to see diversity of CASE partners (as appropriate to individual student needs) and this diversity will be monitored through the annual reporting system.

D. Governance Structures

28. Each DTP is expected to have a lead operational manager and senior management body with overall responsibility for the effective governance of the DTP and its funding from NERC. DTPs must be able to demonstrate to NERC that robust and transparent governance arrangements are in place.

29. It is expected that DTP students should have the opportunity to be involved in the management/running of activities of the DTP.
30. All applications for NERC studentships based at the DTP must be administered through the DTPs. If an applicant has a complaint or concern regarding their application, it is essential that they raise this through the DTP's own complaints and appeals procedure at the earliest opportunity.
31. Should a student leave early, a DTP may replace this student if sufficient funds are available within the DTG. If necessary, funding can be drawn from another DTG or funding source.

E. Student recruitment

32. As of 2016, all NERC DTPs (and CDTs) have agreed to adhere to a universal studentship offer acceptance date which will be agreed each year. For the 2016/17 intake this deadline is Wednesday 16 March 2016 at 12pm. Applicants for studentships will not be obliged to accept a NERC DTP studentship offer before this date unless they wish to do so, thus giving them the opportunity to make informed choices between multiple offers. DTPs will still be able to recruit after this date.

F. Reporting (TGC I3)

33. Each NERC DTP DTG will require a Final Expenditure Statement upon completion. The final payment for the DTG will not be made in advance as normal but will be made in arrears following receipt and verification of the FES. If the FES is not received within three months of the end of the award, NERC will recover 20% of the expenditure incurred on the grant. If it has not been received within six months after the end of the award, NERC will recover all expenditure except where NERC has given prior agreement to a postponement.
34. In cases where payments still need to be made after the end date of the DTG, for example, because of sickness, maternity or part-time working; a grant end date extension should be requested by submitting a Grant Maintenance Request in Je-S (in plenty of time prior to the end date) to cover any required payments. Once an expenditure statement has been received and the expenditure incurred has been reconciled against payments made, it will be considered as final. Costs arising from maternity, additional paternity or adoptive leave or sick leave should be identified in the absence heading of the statement. DTPs are expected to use the flexibilities within their other DTGs to manage these costs in the majority of cases however.
35. NERC reserves the right to require the Research Organisation to complete and submit a statement of expenditure at any time during the course of the DTG, or to provide supplementary information in support of an interim or final expenditure statement.

36. NERC require that the DTPs submit an offline annual report with the intention of providing NERC with data regarding external collaborations, CASE involvement, student research outputs and training, supervisor development and any additional issues arising affecting the DTP.
37. NERC should be notified of any major changes to DTP governance or programme structure by submission of a Significant Change Form electronically to researchcareers@nerc.ac.uk. This form will be reviewed by at least two members of NERC's Training Advisory Board before a change is approved by NERC.
38. In addition to the aforementioned reporting, DTPs will be required to host formal and informal visits from NERC. Partnerships will be provided information about these visits in a timely manner by NERC.
39. There is a four-year submission period for all NERC DTP students – including those funded for four years. Students who submit after this period will count against the host RO's four-year submission rate. Submission rates will be monitored over the lifetime of the DTPs.
40. Should a student have undertaken a period of abeyance (maternity leave, illness, etc.) or have changed to part-time working, the studentship end dates and expected submission date should be extended accordingly in the Je-S SDP to accommodate these changes without affecting the submission rate.

G. Training

41. There are no restrictions on the involvement of students not funded by NERC with training offered as part of the NERC DTP programme. However, this involvement must not be to the detriment of the training experience of the NERC-funded students within the DTP.

H. Strategic Engagement

42. NERC does not wish to cultivate a direct relationship with its students and expect partnerships and individual supervisors to act as agents on NERC's behalf for the majority of communication between NERC and DTP students. Partnerships and individual supervisors should encourage their students to engage with NERC activities and opportunities as an important aspect of their professional and technical development.
43. In order to provide a mechanism for businesses and others to source new research developments with commercial potential, RCUK have launched [Gateway to Research](#) (GtR). GtR provides information on NERC's investments in research including training

grants and will contain information regarding the NERC DTP awards. Further information on GtR is available on the RCUK website linked to above.

I. Data Availability

44. It is NERC policy to increase the visibility and awareness of environmental data and to improve their management as a resource. The DTP should therefore ensure that NERC Designated Data Centres are aware of significant datasets generated, or to be compiled, under the award so that their long-term stewardship can be planned.

J. Research Experience Placements (REPs)

45. From 2015 onwards, NERC will allocate funding for REPs to each DTP award. NERC recognises that there is a shortage of individuals with quantitative skills coming into environmental science. The REPs are aimed at addressing this shortage by offering funding for summer placements, which focus on encouraging undergraduate students who are studying quantitative disciplines outside NERC remit to consider a career in environmental research. REPs should be used to attract students to the research areas corresponding with the host DTP. Although the funds will be allocated to the lead organisations of each DTP, NERC expect REPs to take place across training partners within each DTP to ensure they are aligned with the most active and relevant research departments present.

K. Contact

46. For any queries regarding the DTPs please contact the [NERC Research Careers Team](#).
47. Queries relating to the Je-S system (including FEC queries) should be directed to the [Je-S Helpdesk](#)
48. All queries concerning doctoral training grant administrative issues should be submitted to the [NERC Research Careers mailbox](#).

L. Other NERC Webpages

49. [NERC Strategy](#)
50. [NERC Science Remit](#)

51. [Current Opportunities](#)
52. [NERC Complaints Procedure](#)
53. [NERC Scientific Services and Facilities](#)
54. [NERC Data Centres](#)

M. Frequently Asked Questions

55. *Can supervisor costs be drawn from a NERC student's RTSG? For example, to allow the supervisor to instruct the student in the field at the start of a fieldwork season.*

Yes, supervisor costs can be drawn from a NERC DTP student's RTSG where appropriate. NERC expects all use of funds in this manner to be in the student's best interest and to be for the benefit of their research and training development. The mechanism for handling funding at this level is at the DTP's discretion but, as with all NERC funding, proper financial management and accountability for use of public funds must be considered at all times.

Where possible NERC encourage supervisors to draw this funding from other sources or centralised DTP funding so as not discourage or disadvantage students from undertaking expensive projects requiring significant, hands-on supervisor input.

Supervisor costs of this nature must be directly linked to the student's research and training development. For example, costs to support a period of supervisory instruction in the field would be permissible but costs to support the supervisor to attend a conference alongside the student would not.

56. *Do the NERC DTPs have to have 30% of the student starts each year awarded as CASE studentships?*

No, NERC require 30% of all student starts over the entire lifetime of the DTPs to be awarded as CASE.

57. *Can NERC Research Centres act as CASE partners for DTP students?*

Yes, NERC Research Centres can act as CASE partners and must comply with all of the standard requirements for this scheme.

58. *Where there is more than one CASE partner on one studentship, do all partners each have to contribute £1000 p.a. and provide a minimum 3-month placement?*

No, the minimum partner contribution to a CASE studentship *as a whole* should be £1000 p.a. and at least 3 months' placement. This minimum requirement can be met collectively by multiple CASE partners.

59. *Do the recent changes to the way in which CASE partner financial contributions are made (i.e. paid directly to the RO for the purpose of supplementing the RTSG) affect payments for existing studentships?*

No, the new rules regarding CASE partner financial contributions will only come into force for new studentships starting in the 2016/17 academic year. This in line with the implementation of these changes for the 2015 Industrial CASE competition.

60. *Do fees-only students qualify as NERC students, even though less than 50% of their studentship is paid for by NERC?*

Yes, EU fees-only students will still qualify as NERC students and can be included in the DTP's notional studentship headcount. For a fees-only student, *all* the student's fees must be funded by NERC.

61. *Is it possible for a fees-only student to convert to a full award during their PhD if they acquire the status of being ordinarily resident for three years during the course of their studies?*

No, under the harmonised RCUK Terms and Conditions of Training Grants students' status at the point of registration dictates their eligibility for a fees-only or full award for the duration of their studentship.

62. *Is it possible for DTP students to transfer to another Research Organisation?*

Yes, students may transfer to a different Research Organisation where it is essential for their training (e.g. when a supervisor is moving and no appropriate alternative supervision is available) and should be by agreement between the Research Organisations involved. The SDP should be updated accordingly to reflect the new submitting/degree awarding RO.

Where a student is moving to an organisation that is part of the same NERC DTP, it is expected that there will be no change in the student's access to cohort-level training or DTP-level reporting.

If a student moves to an organisation that is part of a different NERC DTP, the two DTPs concerned should come to an agreement about which cohort the student will be officially trained in, ensuring they continue to receive appropriate access to transferrable skills training and cohort activities. This will also determine which DTP is required to report on that student to NERC.

If a student moves to an organisation that is entirely outside of a NERC DTP, NERC will seek assurance from the organisations involved that the student will still have appropriate access to cohort activities and transferrable skills training in line with the principles on which DTPs were funded. This would ideally be within their original DTP cohort, although individual arrangements should be discussed with NERC on a case-by-case basis.

The transfer of a student will include transfer of the relevant funds for that studentship to the new organisation. Where funds from an individual studentship have been retained for contribution to cohort-level transferrable skills training, these should be held by whichever DTP or organisation is responsible for continuing this element of the student's training.