

NERC Doctoral training partnership 2 (DTP2) Guidance document

All NERC Training Grant (TG) awards must adhere to the [UKRI Research Council training grants terms and conditions](#), [NERC DTP2 Specific Terms and Conditions](#), and the [Statement of Expectation for Doctoral Training](#)

NERC reserves the right to alter this guidance document over the lifetime of the DTP programme. All DTP award holders will be notified of changes when they occur.

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Definitions

NERC Doctoral Training Partnership (DTP): 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 number of notional studentships and each DTP has 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. This position should not be interpreted as recognition of a dominant partner which will host the majority of the studentships.

Hosting Partner: Involvement in a DTP can be either a hosting partner or a collaborative partner. Hosting partners are organisations that are both (a) eligible for NERC funding; and (b) intending to provide the principal base (host) for students during the tenure of the award as identified in the DTP2 proposal. Hosting partners will (i) support and host students within the DTP, (ii) contribute towards an appropriate management structure for the DTP, and (iii) comply with NERC’s reporting and evaluation procedures for the DTP.

Collaborative Partner: Involvement in a DTP can be either a hosting partner or a collaborative partner. Collaborative partners are institutions that are not eligible for NERC funding; and/or organisations that are eligible for NERC funding but do not intend to provide the principal base (host) for students during the award. Collaborative Partners provide additional benefits to the students’ experience e.g. real-world experience, training, equipment, facilities, understanding opportunity.

CASE Partner: CASE Partners are a type of DTP Partner that provide 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. CASE Partners must meet the CASE requirements for the scheme.

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.

Training Grant (TG): NERC awards studentship funding directly to Research Organisations (ROs) through the use of a Training Grant (TG) and not to students directly. DTPs can support more than the minimum number of students each year using this flexible funding for example via co-funding arrangements, however please note that the student must be at least 50% funded by a NERC TG to be classified as a NERC student.

Research Training Support Grant (RTSG): Studentship funding is comprised of four components; the student stipend, fees, RTSG and the management costs. The RTSG funding does not change over the lifetime of the DTP award unlike the stipend and fees that rise in line with the GDP deflator and are announced annually by UK Research and Innovation(UKRI).

Joint Electronic Submission (Je-S): The system used by NERC for the submission of applications to the central grants management system.

Research Organisation (RO): Organisations that are eligible for Research Council funding, as described on the UKRI website. The RO is the recipient of the DTP Award.

Final Expenditure Statement (FES): This statement is the final financial reporting activity completed by the institution. For DTPs this is the responsibility of the Administrative Lead DTP partner to submit through Je-S at the end of the training grant.

Interim Expenditure Statement (IES): A mid-term statement of financial records requested by NERC. The Administrative lead DTP partner will be required to submit the IES upon request to NERC.

Disability Student Allowance (DSA): If a student has a long-term disability, and as a result of that disability they are obliged to incur additional expenditure in connection with their studies, they may be eligible for extra allowances, known as Disabled Students' Allowances. The Research Organisation (RO) hosting the studentship should apply for DSA and not the student themselves. For more information, see the [funding for research training- external link](#) page of the UKRI website.

London Allowance: If a student will be spending a minimum continuous period of 12 months in London then the student is entitled to a London Allowance of £2,000 per annum that will be added as a supplement to the student's stipend. Following notification by the DTP of eligible students to NERC an additional funding stream will be added to the DTP Training Grant.

Purpose of document

This DTP2 guidance document should be used as a guide for the management of DTPs awarded through the DTP2 call in conjunction with the NERC specific DTP2 Terms and Conditions, and alongside the [UKRI Training Grant Terms and Conditions](#).

Summary

Doctoral Training Partnerships (DTPs) are funded by NERC to provide excellent postgraduate research opportunities within the NERC science remit as well as varied professional and technical skills and personal development training.

DTP postgraduate training is delivered in collaboration with partners from a wide range of backgrounds, including industry, specialist research organisations, charities, non-governmental organisations, government bodies and many more, to ensure NERC DTP students are equipped with the skills and experiences to allow them to become world-leaders in their chosen careers.

The first phase of NERC DTPs (DTP1) invested in five annual student intakes between 2014 and 2018. A total of 15 DTPs were awarded.

NERC commissioned its second round of DTP investment (DTP2) through a fully open competitive call with funding confirmed in October 2018. The DTP2 investment is for five annual student intakes from 2019 to 2023. For DTP2, a total of 17 DTPs were awarded.

A. Funding

All expenses must constitute a justifiable use of public money and may be audited over the lifetime of the DTP programme.

Funding process

1. 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.
2. 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 should not be shorter than three years in length.
3. 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.

Training grant

1. Training Grants (TGs) will consist of the basic costs (please see [UKRI Training Grant Guidance](#)) and the funding indexed to allow for enough funds to cover yearly increases in the stipend and fees. The indexation rate over the four years of each studentship 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.

2. The TG will be paid to the Administrative Lead Partner. The first payment for the first cohort will be made following receipt of the starting certificate from the DTP Administrative Lead Partner.
3. For each subsequent annual cohort thereafter (i.e. cohorts 2-5) an additional funding stream will be added to the original TG and will run for four years (i.e. the maximum studentship duration). For each new cohort the first payment will be made in October to coincide with the start date of the annual student intake. Payments will be made quarterly to the Administrative Lead Partner over the four year lifespan of each annual cohort.
4. The standard funding period will span nine of NERC's financial years (i.e. first cohort starting in 2019/20 and the fifth cohort completing in 2026/27). The funding period may exceed nine financial years if the DTP grant requires an extension. Reasons for this may include, but is not limited to; part-time students, student extensions, student suspension etc.
5. Eligible students must receive at least the UKRI National Minimum Doctoral Stipend appropriate for the current year of study (see [UKRI Funding for Research Training](#)).
6. Information regarding the agreed UKRI minimum stipend and indicative fee rates are published annually on the [UKRI Funding for Research Training webpage](#). (Usually between January – March)

Management costs

7. Funding of £1500 is awarded for each notional studentship to contribute toward the management costs related to the running of each DTP. These Management Fees should be included in Expenditure Statements.

Adjustments to funding

8. If NERC is required to make adjustments to any DTP award it will do so in a way that does not impact on the funding for individual students that have already begun their PhD training.
9. Virement between NERC TGs is not permitted but students can be supported from multiple NERC TGs, including those awarded pre-DTP. DTPs should use the flexibility within their TGs to manage funding for all their NERC funded students, avoiding the need to request no-cost extensions to individual TGs.
10. Virement between all headings within the main TG is permissible (Stipend, Fees & RTSG). Please note, virement between additional fund headings, such as Disabled Students Allowance, is not allowed. Funding allocated under these headings must be used solely for the purpose for which it was awarded.
11. Unallocated funding remaining from a NERC DTP TG can be used to assist with the administration of training (see [UKRI Training Grant Terms and Conditions TGC 5](#)). Please

note, the [NERC DTP Training Grant Terms and Conditions](#) for DTP2 awards available online reflects this position.

London allowance

12. London Allowance (**TGC 3 & 10. London and Other Allowances**): NERC will contact the DTPs shortly before the cohort start date 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 TG providing these funds, which will be paid in the same manner as other TG payments. The first payment for London allowance will be made with the first payment from the annual cohort's funding stream (i.e. October). 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.
13. If a student starts beyond October, the DTP must report London Allowance to NERC within 1 month of the student starting their studentship.

Financial reporting

14. Each TG will require a Final Expenditure Statement (FES) (**TGC 6**). 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. Once the FES has been returned, and the expenditure incurred has been reconciled, the statement will be considered as final.
15. An Interim Expenditure statement will be requested by NERC at the mid-term point of the DTP grant, i.e. four years into the standard 8 years of initial support. The report must show the financial record of the DTP grant and must be provided upon request, the NERC office will contact the DTPs in good time before the deadline for submission.

International Students

16. Up to 10% of DTP students recruited over the duration of the DTP award can be international. International students should be supported on a full award with the same terms as a home student. The higher international fee rate is expected to be waived for these students, meaning that fees can only be paid at the same rate as home students.
17. EU students are eligible to receive a full award (rather than fees-only) if recruited as an international student within the 10% limitation.

B. Training requirements

18. It is a requirement for all NERC DTPs to deliver high quality training experiences for students. To ensure this, all NERC DTPs must provide the below training requirements to ensure a successful training programme.
19. The DTP will deliver the following for all students:
 - Access for all DTP students to placements, internships or other relevant work experience opportunities (this includes Research Council Policy Internships). Training programmes should be designed with the flexibility to enable students to undertake such work experience opportunities. It is not compulsory that students undertake available training opportunities but they must be made available to all students;

- Explicit careers training and continuous professional development relevant to both academic and non-academic career trajectories. Careers training must take place suitably early in students' training to inform students choice of training opportunities;
- Strong end-user engagement throughout DTP training;
- Dedicated professional skills, and innovation/translation training available to all DTP students;
- Access for all students to appropriate data and quantitative skills training;
- Opportunities to network across DTP/CDT/Research Council cohorts and gain multidisciplinary perspectives;
- Training Needs Analysis (or equivalent) for all students is mandatory at the outset of training and the opportunity to discuss individual training requirements throughout their PhD. Discussion of training needs and available opportunities should take place in discussion with end-users as appropriate and be placed within the context of potential future careers.

C. Reporting and monitoring

Annual reports and visits

20. DTPs must complete the annual report which will take the form of a pro forma provided by NERC in autumn each year, with the first required by the 31st August 2020. Information on the exact deadline date for submission will be circulated by NERC in good time ahead of this date for the years after 2020. These reports must be submitted electronically to researchcareers@nerc.ukri.org and NOT through Je-S or UKSBS Ltd. The form is harmonised at the UKRI level and captures information not stored in the Joint Electronic Submission System (Je-S) including data on the student recruitment (including equality and diversity), CASE studentships, additional studentship funding sources, investments in the DTP (cash value and in-kind), training and cohort building provision, impacts, and updates and feedback.
21. The DTP will be required to discuss the progress and performance of the DTP with the NERC Executive and may involve contributions from the management board, partners and students in the spring/summer each year. Meetings will be framed around NERC's six success criteria; Research Excellence, Training Excellence, Multidisciplinary Training Environment, Excellent Students, Quality Assurance, and Success Stories.

Student details on Je-S

22. Student details on Je-S must be maintained at all times by the DTP. If issues are encountered the DTP should, in the first instance, contact the Je-S helpdesk (JeSHelp@rcuk.ac.uk; +44 (0) 1793 44 4164). Please see the [Je-S helpdesk website](#) for further information.

D. CASE and Collaborative (non-CASE) studentships

CASE Studentships

23. NERC studentships can be delivered in collaboration with non-academic partners from the private, public and third/civil sectors; where studentships are delivered within CASE requirements, they are referred to as 'CASE studentships'. CASE studentships provide the PhD students with enhanced training opportunities by ensuring they spend between three and eighteen months, in total, with their CASE partner in a workplace outside the academic environment.

24. Impact is one of the CASE scheme's main criteria. Studentships should demonstrate the potential for societal or economic impact through collaboration with the CASE partner and the provision of high quality training in research skills.

25. CASE partner eligibility
 - Any organisation eligible to receive NERC research funding will not be eligible to act as a CASE partner. This includes [Research Council Institutes](#) and [Independent Research Organisations \(IROs\)](#).
 - International CASE partners are eligible provided they are a non-academic organisation, and the DTP can evidence that the CASE criteria has been met and that the placement provides an opportunity for the student to gain skills that could not be provided by a UK-based partner. The student must be fully supported by the DTP and CASE partner throughout the placement period.

26. CASE partner requirements
 - The CASE partner(s) must supplement the studentship by a minimum of £1000 p.a. for the lifetime of the studentship. This payment should be made to the lead Research Organisation to supplement the RTSG and not paid directly to the student.
 - The CASE partner(s) must host the student for between three and eighteen months during their PhD, during which time they will undertake work outside the academic environment. This placement does not need to occur in one single continuous period.
 - CASE partners are expected to meet the extra expenses incurred by the student when visiting and working within their establishment.
 - CASE partners are expected to contribute in cash or in kind towards necessary materials and/or facilities not possessed by the Research Organisation concerned that are required by the student to undertake research integral to their CASE studentship.

Collaborative (non-CASE) studentships

27. In addition to CASE studentships, any number of DTP studentships may be 'collaborative' (i.e. no formal partnership requirements and/or project partners not eligible to be CASE partners).

28. DTPs working with a partner that do not meet the requirements for CASE are considered a collaborative (non-CASE) partner. These collaborative studentships are monitored by NERC through reporting processes and will be formally recognised by NERC as a success.

metric as part of the ongoing monitoring of the DTP performance.

E. Advanced Training

Research Experience Placements

29. 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 DTP.
30. NERC will contact the DTP annually with details of their allocation. Funding of up to £2,500 will be made available per REP to cover the stipend (minimum of £200 per week) and a contribution towards research and training expenses (up to £500). Additional funding beyond this amount must be found from other sources, including the department.
31. Although the funds will be allocated to the Administrative Lead Partner, NERC expects REPs to take place across the hosting partners and relevant collaborative partners. The award of the REP allocation between partners is at the discretion of each DTP's management group.
32. NERC payments to the DTP are provided via an additional funding stream following submission of post-REP final report forms, in which all costs are to be itemised.
33. The Administrative Lead Partner is responsible for:
 - Coordinating the REP award process across relevant partners;
 - Collating of the REP final report forms for submission to NERC;
 - Disseminating REP funds to host organisations as appropriate following payment from NERC.
34. Please see the [NERC website on REPs](#) for the student, research project and hosting organisation eligibility criteria.

Frequently asked questions

Funding

Q: How will the funding be managed by the Administrative Lead DTP organisation?

A: NERC expects the DTP partners involved in each DTP to come to an agreement about the transferring of funding. The Training Grant (TG) will not be amended to accommodate these arrangements. The Administrative Lead Partner is responsible for ensuring the agreed funds are transferred to DTP partners. NERC expects all institutions and individuals involved in the delivery of a studentship to place paramount importance on the interests of the students when making decisions about the transfer of funding.

Q: Will the funding for each studentship remain the same over the 5 cohorts?

A: No, the figures under Stipend and Fees will be indexed to accommodate rises in the UKRI indicative stipend and fees levels over the lifetime of the studentship.

Q: Can a DTP fund more than the minimum notional studentship allocation?

A: It is permitted for DTPs to use the DTP Training Grant to support more than the minimum number of students each year. For example, this could be achieved by the DTP adjusting the studentship timeframe (i.e. between 3-4 years as appropriate to the discipline and the student's experience/knowledge) and by obtaining co-funding students from other sources. It is strongly recommended that, where possible, co-funding from non-Research Council sources is used to part-fund NERC students (rather than wholly fund individual students at 100%) so that all DTP students have equal access to the opportunities available to Research Council-funded students and can be registered on Je-S for reporting purposes.

Q: What can a RTSG be used for?

A: Although the RTSG component of each training grant is calculated on the basis of an amount per notional studentship awarded, there is flexibility regarding the amount of RTSG funding any one student can receive. DTPs are able to allocate funding at their discretion across the studentships they are offering taking into account the different funding requirements between projects but must ensure that all students are supported fairly. The DTP must be clear with each student regarding how much RTSG is available at the outset of the project and how to access the funds.

Q: Will an Expenditure Statement be requested in advance of the end of the DTP award?

A: DTPs are expected to hold secure, accurate and justifiable records of their financial expenditure at all times. In addition to the Final Expenditure Statement (FES), DTPs should anticipate a request from NERC for an interim expenditure statement before the completion of the award for monitoring purposes.

Student recruitment

Q: What is the student Universal Acceptance Date and when is this released?

A: All NERC DTP2 award holders must adhere to an annual universal acceptance deadline for PhD studentship offers. The purpose of the annual universal acceptance deadline is to ensure that PhD applicants who have applied for multiple studentship opportunities, and may therefore receive multiple offers, do not have to make a decision on the studentship they wish to accept before knowing the outcome of all of their applications. Applicants who receive a PhD studentship offer from a DTP or CDT for the upcoming academic year are therefore not required to accept an offer formally before this date unless they wish to do so. The exact date depends on the year but usually falls within March for the upcoming intake and will be listed on the [NERC website](#) when released. The lead contact for DTPs will be contacted by NERC when this date has been finalised.

Q: Does NERC advise on a preferred strategy for student selection?

A: The process for student recruitment is determined by the DTP and should reflect that outlined in the original proposal as well as meeting the institutional level requirements. This process may evolve over the course of the DTP lifetime if needed but must be fair, open and transparent.

Governance

Q: What is the role of the Administrative Lead Partner?

A: This is the organisation that will receive the TG funding from NERC, and will be the main point of contact between NERC and the DTP. The position of Administrative Lead Partner does not confer upon itself the position of the dominant partner that will host the majority of studentships.

Q: How will studentships be allocated across the DTP consortium?

A: This is for the DTP management board to determine, however, the DTP must ensure that regardless of the hosting partner organisation, each student has equal access to opportunities across the DTP. The DTP should make every effort to maintain the cohort effect across geographical locations. It is important that the DTP considers a balance of NERC remit coverage across the DTP.

Q: Can new collaborative partners join the DTP consortium following the funding award?

A: Yes, provided this is reviewed and accepted by the DTP management board. There is no limit on the number of partners in a DTP consortium. The DTP should be prepared to provide supporting evidence should this be requested by NERC to prove it is a genuine partnership.

Q: Are there opportunities for the administrative/management staff from different DTPs to gather and discuss good practice?

A: DTPs are encouraged to arrange events to share and develop strategies to delivery effective training amongst the DTPs and CDTs.

Reporting and monitoring

Q: Who is responsible for reporting for each individual student?

A: The responsibility for completing the Research Councils' requirements for reporting on students through the Je-S Studentship Details Portal (Je-S SDP) lies with the institution hosting the studentship and not the DTP Administrative Lead Partner.

Q: How will non-CASE collaborative studentships be formally measured?

A: These studentships will be recognised and monitored through annual reporting. Given the varied nature of such collaborative studentships, it is not possible to put a standard value on them or apply a quantitative target, but they will be used by NERC as an indicator of impact and success.

CASE and Collaborative (non-CASE) studentships

Q: Can new CASE partners be incorporated over the lifetime of the DTP?

A: Provided the DTP is willing and able to accommodate, new CASE partners can be incorporated into the DTP.

Q: Can NERC Research Centres act as CASE partners?

A: Any organisation eligible to receive NERC research funding, such as NERC Research Centres, will not be eligible to act as a CASE partner; however, students working with such organisations may be classed as undertaking a collaborative studentship.

Q: Does a CASE placement extend the length of the studentship?

A: CASE placements are integrated into the studentship and therefore are not considered an extension but rather an enhanced studentship opportunity with the CASE partner, therefore the studentship should be completed within the maximum four-year period. The placement can be completed by the student across several periods or one longer period but must total between three and eighteen months.

Q: Can a CASE partner be international?

A: As for DTPI, CASE partners should ideally have a UK base and UK partners should therefore be sought in the first instance. However, if it can be demonstrated that an international partner is offering collaborative benefits, training and expertise that are not available from any organisation within the UK, NERC would allow involvement of an international partner. The financial and supervisory support for a student working with an international partner should also be considered from the outset of project development.

Q: Does the 25% CASE requirement need to be met by the DTP in the first year?

A: No, NERC expects the DTP to deliver the CASE requirement for those allocated to the DTP over the course of the DTP lifetime (rather than annually). Progress and predicted trajectory of the CASE studentship delivery will be monitored annually via reporting forms and will be reviewed after two student intakes.

Q: 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?

A: 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.

Q: If a studentship is 3.5 years in duration, how much should the CASE partner contribute to the studentship?

A: A CASE partner should contribute £1,000p.a. as a minimum. Our expectation is that the CASE partner contribution is prorated for full and part time students; therefore, for a full time 3.5 year studentship we would expect a minimum contribution of £3,500 (3.5 x £1,000). The amount paid by the CASE partner should always be agreed at the outset of the studentship.

Advance Training

Q: What is a Training Needs Analysis?

A: A Training Needs Analysis (TNA) is a framework to identify and assess each student's training needs, establish priorities and record completed training opportunities. This is usually provided as a form and should be customised to the student from the outset on their doctoral research and reviewed by the student and their supervisor at regular intervals. All DTPs must ensure a TNA (or similar) is provided to all students from the outset of their studentship and must be reviewed regularly by the student and supervisor.

Q: What is the Research Council Policy Internships Scheme and who covers the cost of the placement?

A: The [Research Council Policy Internships Scheme](#) provides the opportunity for NERC funded PhD students to work for three months in one of a selected group of highly influential policy organisations. For students funded by DTP2 the cost of the three-month internship must be covered by the DTP and will not be reimbursed by NERC.

Q: My DTP has a course that would be of interest to other DTP students, can NERC share the training opportunity?

A: NERC is able to circulate a relevant course to the DTP community provided the following information on the course is supplied; title, summary, date, location, deadline for applications and course contact (and URL link if available). Please submit your advert to researchcareers@nerc.ukri.org.