

NERC Doctoral Training Partnerships Second Round Funding Call (DTP2) Town Hall Meeting – Summary

30 January 2018, Royal Society, London

1. **The meeting was opened by Nigel Brown** (Chair of the NERC Training Advisory Board), who welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained the purpose of the day. The aim of the meeting was for NERC to disseminate call guidance, to enable community feedback to NERC and to provide an opportunity for those present to network with prospective partners. The meeting was attended by representatives from a wide range of UK institutions, including those involved in existing Doctoral Training Partnerships (DTPs) and Centres for Doctoral Training (CDTs). A full list of attendees is provided in Annex A.
2. **Katie Tearall** (Head of Research Careers, NERC) first gave an overview of NERC's postgraduate training portfolio before providing a brief background to the objectives of NERC DTPs, the first phase of DTP investment (DTP1), and the outcomes of the recent [mid-term evaluation of the DTP scheme](#). She discussed key aspects of DTP training and lessons learned from the DTP evaluation, which have been used to inform the current call.
3. **Vicki Durbridge** (Senior Programme Manager – Doctoral Training, NERC) gave a summary of the Announcement of Opportunity (AO) for NERC's second phase of investment in DTPs (DTP2). Vicki highlighted the key dates of the call, identified the main differences and similarities between DTP1 and DTP2, clarified terminology used within the call scope, and summarised the assessment process.
4. The NERC presentations by Katie Tearall and Vicki Durbridge are available [online](#).
5. After the presentations from NERC, there was the opportunity for attendees to ask questions during a plenary Q&A session before an afternoon of networking. The following is a summary of the questions raised during the plenary session, and the responses provided by NERC:



Application Process and Eligibility

Q: Do we need to have the proposal signed off by the Vice Chancellor (or equivalent) of all Hosting Partners? And will they need to complete a formal partner support form, as in the DTP1 call?

A: Support forms or letters of support signed by Vice Chancellors (or equivalent) will not be required from Hosting Partners submitting proposals to this call. Instead, the AO states that by submitting a proposal to this call, all Hosting Partners are formally agreeing to the expectations of the call and the submission of a proposal is taken by NERC as confirmation that the proposal has been approved by the Vice Chancellor (or equivalent) of each of the Hosting Partners involved in the DTP.

Q: Is NERC happy with the current spread of research area coverage identified in DTP1, and is it seeking to prioritise any of the areas shown in the graph provided in Annex A of the [DTP2 AO](#)?

A: This graph is included for illustration and guidance. It should be noted that the graph does not include other NERC studentship investments which also contribute to coverage of the NERC remit. Through DTP2, as with DTP1, NERC is aiming to fund DTPs that, collectively, provide appropriate coverage of its remit.

Q: Can an existing CDT apply to this DTP2 call?

A: Existing CDTs may apply to this call if they are able to demonstrate that they meet the criteria of the call. CDTs are much more focused than DTPs, so this will need to be considered when developing a proposal.

Funding

Q: NERC requires that all NERC-funded studentships are offered on either a full- or part-time basis. Can NERC provide guidance on how DTPs should manage the support of part-time students whose PhDs extend beyond the lifetime of the DTP grant?

A: There are various ways of dealing with this, dependent on the situation of the individual research organisation that is supporting the student. For example, funding for these students can be drawn from a subsequent NERC training grant held by the organisation, if one is available, or a no-cost extension to the DTP grant can be awarded. The pros and cons of any approach can be discussed with NERC before a course of action is decided.

Q: With regards to evidencing management resource committed to the DTP, does NERC want all the DTP partners to document their financial expenses in detail, such as including the cost of time committed by academics?

A: NERC has no expectation of a fully itemised financial breakdown of staff time to be contributed to the DTP. However, we will require sufficient evidence of what management resource will be committed and how it will be provided by the DTP partners.



Q: Given that innovation and entrepreneurial training are now mandatory requirements for all DTP2 training programmes, does this mean NERC will no longer award added value innovation training funding to DTPs?

A: Yes. The two previous added value innovation training funding calls for existing DTPs and CDTs utilised time-limited funding opportunities within NERC, but it has been recognised that they were extremely popular and yielded valuable outcomes and impacts. Therefore, to continue to ensure that all DTP students have access to this valuable training, DTPs will be required to incorporate it into their programmes from the outset.

Q: In the presentation, it was suggested that the cost of all training activities must be supported using funds within the doctoral training grant. Is this the case?

A: To clarify – while it is true that there will be no supplementary funds provided by NERC to support the costs of DTP students’ training activities, it is possible for DTPs to supplement their training grant funds with leverage from other sources, as has always been the case for NERC DTPs.

Q: When there are students trained within a DTP cohort who are not funded by a NERC grant, how are they identified by NERC and can they still benefit from DTP training activities and other NERC-funded training opportunities such as Advanced Training Short Courses?

A: Students that are aligned with/incorporated into DTP cohorts, but not directly funded by a DTP grant, are recorded and monitored via NERC’s annual reporting processes. This enables NERC to assess the wider impact of its investment. It is up to DTPs to establish appropriate mechanisms for allowing these students access to their own training programme activities. The same process of recording incorporated/aligned students through annual monitoring will apply for DTP2 awards. For NERC-funded activities such as Advanced Training Short Courses, non-NERC-funded students are eligible to apply to these courses; however, NERC-funded students will take priority for the places available. As stated in the AO, wherever possible, it is strongly encouraged that match-funded students within DTPs are supported at least 50% from the NERC grant to enable them to be registered as NERC students – this ensures they are entered onto NERC’s central reporting systems and have access to all the benefits afforded to Research Council students.

Q: The AO states that the funding for student training can range between three and four years; however, many students take the full four years to submit their thesis. Has this level of flexibility in funding duration always been possible, and has NERC considered the impacts on those students who take longer than their funded period to submit their thesis?

A: The minimum and maximum duration of the ‘funded period of study’ for NERC-funded PhD studentships has not changed. As stated in the presentation, and outlined in the [RCUK Terms and Conditions of Training Grants](#) and [accompanying guidance](#), there is a common expectation from all Research Councils that doctoral projects and training programmes are designed and supervised in such a way that students are able to submit their thesis within their funded period. DTPs must therefore take this into consideration when designing training programmes and selecting PhD projects if they choose to make use of the flexibility in funding offered through DTP awards. Additionally, the expected duration of an individual student’s PhD and funding should be agreed between the research organisation and the student at the outset so that all parties are clear what is expected.



Collaborative Studentships

Q: Is the 25% CASE conversion requirement a proportion of the notional studentships allocated to the DTP, or in the actual number of individual students supported by the DTP?

A: This requirement is for at least 25% of the number of notional studentships allocated to the DTP to be delivered as CASE studentships. This requirement is applied over the lifetime of the award (rather than annually). For example, if a DTP is allocated 20 notional studentships by NERC per year over five intakes (i.e. 100 studentships total), they would be required to deliver *at least* 25 CASE studentships over the duration of the DTP award. Progress and trajectory of CASE studentship delivery will be monitored through annual reporting and discussed with DTP award holders as appropriate.

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.

Q: Is there any flexibility with regards to the formal requirements for CASE studentships? For example, can in-kind contributions be accepted from CASE partners in place of the £1000 payment as a demonstration of commitment to the project?

A: NERC currently has no plans to amend the CASE requirements and all requirements outlined in the [presentation](#) will be required for a studentship to count as CASE. As identified in [NERC's 2014 review of the CASE scheme](#), the requirements put in place by NERC are still considered appropriate and act as a demonstration of commitment by partners to the studentship. However, we will continue to listen to feedback from research organisations and CASE partners and take this into consideration when discussing the objectives and mechanisms of the CASE scheme both within NERC and at a cross-UKRI level.

Q: With the implementation of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), is it possible that collaborative training requirements may become more harmonised across the different Research Councils? And what is the likelihood that any changes would be in place in time to affect studentships awarded through this call?

A: The implementation of UKRI will involve increased harmonisation across the Councils in a number of areas, one of which may be collaborative training. The pros and cons of any harmonised approaches would need to be discussed at a cross-Council level, and it is unlikely that any changes would be made in time to incorporate them within this call by the time awards are made.

Q: Are CASE partners from non-UK organisations permitted?

A: As for DTP1, 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 well considered from the outset of project development.

Q: How does NERC define ‘end-user’ as referenced in the AO?

A: As a general rule, an end-user is an organisation whose primary role is not research, but rather is to use the outputs of research in developing business, technology, regulation, policy, or social/environmental enterprise, within the public, private or third sector. For CASE partners specifically, if an organisation is included on the current list of [Independent Research Organisations eligible for Research Council funding](#), or is a Research Council Centre/Institute, they would not be considered an ‘end-user’ for the purposes of a CASE studentship. NERC acknowledges that in reality many individual organisations have multiple roles when it comes to carrying out research and using its outputs, and this is another reason why recognition of non-CASE collaborative studentships has been included in this call. When it comes to non-CASE collaborations, if an individual organisation acts in both a research *and* an end-user capacity, they should make it clear which role they are adopting in their relationship with either the DTP as a whole or any individual studentship projects they are involved in.

DTP Models and Operational Management

Q: What are NERC’s views on whether organisations should collaborate with a large number of partners or a few?

A: As identified in the DTP evaluation, no one DTP model already in place can be said to be more successful. NERC, therefore, has no preference for a particular approach and acknowledges that every approach will have strengths and weaknesses in terms of geographical spread, multidisciplinary and a variety of other factors. What is important is that proposals provide sufficient justification of the DTP model proposed, and consider any challenges that may arise and how to mitigate against them.

Q: Does NERC consider multidisciplinary as research that incorporates a range of disciplines, interacts with different Research Councils, or interacts with industry?

A: It includes all of these. DTPs should provide training in an environment that encourages students to engage with those from other research disciplines and other sectors. Such an environment results in subject experts who can communicate effectively with a wide range of stakeholders with variable backgrounds.

Q: What is NERC’s view on DTPs developing cross-disciplinary PhDs that cover the remits of other Research Councils?

A: As noted in the AO, NERC DTPs may support research training at the interface between environmental sciences and other disciplines, as long as projects are predominantly within NERC’s remit. With regards to co-funding, as has always been the case, NERC classifies a student as NERC-funded if at least 50% of their funding comes from a NERC training grant. It is possible to support the remaining 50% using funds from other Research Councils’ training grants and for students’ projects to span the remits of different Councils. As this call does not have any committed joint funding from other Research Councils, any such co-funding arrangement would need to be developed at the institutional level on the basis of training grant funds from another



Research Council being available to use for this purpose. The terms and conditions of each Research Council's award would also still need to be met.

Q: Did the DTP evaluation specifically address Equality, Diversity & Inclusivity and were any lessons learned that have been addressed in DTP2?

A: The evaluation did not explicitly address E,D&I as a success metric, but it was discussed during interviews, and data on student demographics were collected via evaluation surveys. Demographic data are also routinely collected by all the Research Councils as part of their reporting processes. These statistics are considered at a cross-Council level and any recommendations agreed by RCUK with regards to E,D&I are implemented by all Councils. NERC ensures all new doctoral training funding calls include consideration of widening participation as per the latest guidance from RCUK. This will continue as NERC moves into UKRI.

Q: Does NERC have any guidance on how DTPs should approach student selection?

A: Student recruitment and selection processes are usually set at the institutional level, and it is up to DTPs to establish processes that meet their requirements as dictated by their proposed training model. Additionally, in circumstances where particular skills or areas of remit are over- or undersubscribed, DTPs have the flexibility over the lifetime of their award to address this by adapting project and student selection accordingly.

Q: In the AO, NERC places an emphasis on consideration of the legacy and impact of DTP awards. With that in mind, would NERC consider extending DTP grants by a short period to support staff time for the development of impact analyses and legacy planning? Also, can NERC clarify what it is looking for by way of 'legacy'?

A: DTPs are large investments for NERC. They involve the establishment of significant training infrastructure with the potential for substantial added value and wider impact within the NERC community. It is therefore important that these impacts, in both the immediate and long term, are recorded to enable us to justify the continuation of such investments. With regards to the duration of Doctoral Training Grants, this is dictated by the duration of NERC studentships. At this time there is no plan to change the implementation of DTP2 awards. However, NERC will take note of this suggestion for further consideration. As outlined in the AO, proposals will be required to outline how legacy and impact will be considered from the outset of DTP awards, and NERC's annual monitoring processes will act as a means of gathering such information throughout the lifetime of DTP awards; this is, therefore, not solely a consideration for the end of a DTP grant.

Assessment

Q: How will you deal with conflicts of interest on the assessment panel?

A: Some conflicts of interest will be inevitable for this call. NERC will follow its standard [conflict of interest policy](#) during assessment of proposals submitted to this call and panel membership selection will aim to mitigate against any unavoidable conflicts of interest (for example panel size may be larger than normal). The primary aims of panel selection for this call will be to ensure sufficient balance of expertise and fair assessment of all proposals.



Q: Does the new, equal, weighting of assessment criteria mean NERC now places less importance on research and training excellence than previously, and will this result in changes to studentship allocations to DTPs based on research strengths?

A: No. The equal weighting of all four assessment criteria reflects the fact that NERC considers a combination of all four of these factors to be essential to the successful delivery of a DTP.

Q: Will the existing DTPs have an advantage in this call over new DTP consortia?

A: This is a completely open call, and all applicants will be required to submit a suitably justified and well-evidenced case for support, so it is an equal and fair process for all applicants. All proposals will be assessed against the criteria outlined in this call, based only on the evidence provided in the case for support.

Q: Will the mid-term evaluation feedback reports to individual DTPs be taken into account by the DTP2 assessment panel?

A: No. The purpose of the feedback reports for existing DTPs was to provide confidential feedback to the DTPs and their partners and to enable an effective dialogue between NERC and existing DTP award holders regarding progress monitoring during the remainder of their award. Given that consortia and training programmes proposed through the DTP2 call may differ from those supported through DTP1, and to ensure fairness to all, it would not be appropriate for the panel to refer to these feedback reports as part of the assessment process.

Q: Will NERC use an algorithm based on research income to allocate studentships to DTPs awarded through this call, in the same way that some other Research Councils do?

A: NERC has not included any prerequisite for research grant income in the eligibility criteria for this call, nor will this be the sole measure of research excellence. When allocating studentships to individual DTPs, NERC will consider a number of factors, including what has been requested in the proposal, critical mass of researchers and training capacity, balance of the NERC remit, etc. NERC acknowledges that excellent postgraduate training is not always directly linked to research grant income.

Other NERC Postgraduate Training Investments

Q: Will more National Productivity Investment Fund (NPIF) funding become available in the future?

A: It is likely there will be new NPIF studentships made available in the near future. NERC is not currently able to confirm how many will be allocated or when this will happen. Any NPIF studentship allocations would be additional to those committed through this call, which are allocated from NERC's central training budget for delivery of responsive PhD studentships.

Q: With the introduction of the new flexible funding stream within the NERC postgraduate training portfolio, is there going to be a reduction in CASE studentships funded outside DTPs?

A: The funding available through the flexible funding stream will be used to respond in an agile way to emerging skills needs – the funding mechanisms used in this stream will be dependent on the strategic training need that is being addressed. For 2018, NERC will not be running a separate CASE studentship competition.



Annex A. List of attendees

| Title | Forename | Surname | Organisation |
|-----------|----------|--------------|--|
| Professor | Geoffrey | Duller | Aberystwyth University |
| Professor | John | Healey | Bangor University |
| Dr | Becky | Briant | Birkbeck, University of London |
| Professor | Rick | Stafford | Bournemouth University |
| Dr | Alistair | Crame | British Antarctic Survey |
| Dr | Jon | Naden | British Geological Survey |
| Dr | James | Farror | Cardiff University |
| Professor | Ian | Hall | Cardiff University |
| Dr | Cedric | Laize | Centre for Ecology and Hydrology |
| Dr | Ingo | Schüder | Centre for Ecology and Hydrology |
| Dr | Megan | Webb | Centre for Ecology and Hydrology |
| Dr | Steve | Hallett | Cranfield University |
| Professor | Simon | Pollard | Cranfield University |
| Professor | Leon | Terry | Cranfield University |
| Professor | Andrew | Aplin | Durham University |
| Professor | John | Wainwright | Durham University |
| Dr | Laura | Vickers | Harper Adams University |
| Professor | John | Underhill | Heriot-Watt University |
| Dr | Saskia | Goes | Imperial College London |
| Professor | Joanna | Haigh | Imperial College London |
| Dr | Julie | Prytulak | Imperial College London |
| Miss | Sophie | Smith | Imperial College London |
| Professor | Nigel | Brown | Independent |
| Dr | Ralf | Gertisser | Keele University |
| Professor | Martin | Wooster | King's College London |
| Ms | Nicola | Flook | Lancaster University |
| Ms | Olivia | Lawrenson | Lancaster University |
| Dr | Chris | Carbone | London NERC DTP |
| Ms | Karina | Dixon | London NERC DTP |
| Professor | Mark | Maslin | London NERC DTP |
| Dr | Yamuna | Kaluarachchi | London South Bank University |
| Mrs | Clare | Edwards | Loughborough University |
| Dr | David | Ryves | Loughborough University |
| Professor | Richard | Preziosi | Manchester Met University |
| Dr | Jian | Zhou | Manchester Met University |
| Professor | David | Paterson | Marine Alliance for Science and Technology for Scotland & University of St Andrews |
| Dr | Louise | Whitehouse | National Centre for Atmospheric Science |
| Mrs | Janet | Fillingham | National Centre for Earth Observation |
| Professor | John | Remedios | National Centre for Earth Observation |
| Professor | Angela | Hatton | National Oceanography Centre |
| Dr | Ronald | Jenner | Natural History Museum |



| Title | Forename | Surname | Organisation |
|-----------|-----------|-----------------|-------------------------------------|
| Ms | Vanessa | Pike | Natural History Museum |
| Mrs | Vicki | Durbridge | NERC Head Office |
| Ms | Eve | Sherman | NERC Head Office |
| Dr | Katie | Tearall | NERC Head Office |
| Dr | Jennifer | Wickens | NERC Head Office |
| Dr | Johanna | Gascoigne-Owens | Newcastle University |
| Professor | Selina | Stead | Newcastle University and MMO CSA |
| Professor | Ulrich | Salzmann | Northumbria University |
| Dr | Clare | Warren | Open University |
| Professor | Icarus | Allen | Plymouth Marine Laboratory |
| Dr | Hasan | Shaheed | Queen Mary University of London |
| Professor | Geraldene | Wharton | Queen Mary University of London |
| Dr | Richard | Gianfrancesco | Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew |
| Dr | Alex | Dickson | Royal Holloway University of London |
| Professor | Danielle | Schreve | Royal Holloway University of London |
| Dr | Matthew | Tinsley | Stirling University |
| Dr | Rachelle | Barlow | Swansea University |
| Professor | Daniel | Eastwood | Swansea University |
| Professor | Bernd | Kulesa | Swansea University |
| Professor | Kevin | Fowler | University College London |
| Professor | Rob | Butler | University of Aberdeen |
| Dr | Lucy | Leiper | University of Aberdeen |
| Dr | Matteo | Spagnolo | University of Aberdeen |
| Professor | Sue | Wonnacott | University of Bath |
| Miss | Sara | Kinahan | University of Birmingham |
| Dr | Gregor | Leckebusch | University of Birmingham |
| Professor | Phil | Ashworth | University of Brighton |
| Professor | Neil | Ravenscroft | University of Brighton |
| Professor | Heidy | Mader | University of Bristol |
| Professor | Paul | Valdes | University of Bristol |
| Dr | Carl | Palk | University of Bristol |
| Professor | Christine | Lane | University of Cambridge |
| Dr | Richard | Pope | University of Derby |
| Dr | Alice | Brewer | University of East Anglia |
| Professor | William | Sturges | University of East Anglia |
| Professor | Liz | Baggs | University of Edinburgh |
| Dr | Emma | Cunningham | University of Edinburgh |
| Dr | Richard | Essery | University of Edinburgh |
| Professor | Simon | Mudd | University of Edinburgh |
| Dr | Tom | Cameron | University of Essex |
| Professor | Robbie | McDonald | University of Exeter |
| Ms | Zita | Morris | University of Exeter |
| Professor | Andrew | Watson | University of Exeter |



| Title | Forename | Surname | Organisation |
|-----------|-----------|------------------|---------------------------|
| Dr | Nicholas | Kamenos | University of Glasgow |
| Professor | Daniel | Parsons | University of Hull |
| Professor | Richard | Griffiths | University of Kent |
| Dr | Nigel | Richards | University of Leeds |
| Dr | Sebastian | Rost | University of Leeds |
| Dr | Daniel | Stone | University of Leeds |
| Professor | Mark | Purnell | University of Leicester |
| Dr | Paula | Eves | University of Lincoln |
| Professor | Stuart | Humphries | University of Lincoln |
| Dr | Stephen | Cornell | University of Liverpool |
| Miss | Julie | Samson | University of Manchester |
| Professor | Kevin | Taylor | University of Manchester |
| Professor | Geraint | Vaughan | University of Manchester |
| Professor | Sarah | Metcalfe | University of Nottingham |
| Dr | Barbara | Turnbull | University of Nottingham |
| Ms | Victoria | Forth | University of Oxford |
| Dr | Elizabeth | Jeffers | University of Oxford |
| Professor | Richard | Thompson | University of Plymouth |
| Professor | Gary | Fones | University of Portsmouth |
| Professor | Craig | Storey | University of Portsmouth |
| Dr | Darren | Van Laar | University Of Portsmouth |
| Professor | John | Methven | University of Reading |
| Dr | Richard | Walters | University of Reading |
| Dr | Sarah | Werts | University of Reading |
| Dr | Lewis | Halsey | University of Roehampton |
| Professor | Claire | Ozanne | University of Roehampton |
| Professor | Anne | Robertson | University of Roehampton |
| Dr | Graham | Kiddle | University of Sheffield |
| Professor | Michael | Siva-Jothy | University of Sheffield |
| Dr | Gavin | Thomas | University of Sheffield |
| Mrs | Nicki | Lewin | University of Southampton |
| Professor | Tim | Minshull | University of Southampton |
| Professor | Alberto | Naveira Garabato | University of Southampton |
| Dr | Sue | Hughes | University of Surrey |
| Ms | Amanda | Britt | University of Sussex |
| Professor | Fiona | Mathews | University of Sussex |
| Professor | Julian | Murton | University of Sussex |
| Professor | Robin | Allaby | University of Warwick |
| Dr | Milla | Shah | University of Warwick |
| Dr | Kanchon | Dasmahapatra | University of York |
| Professor | Mathew | Evans | University of York |
| Dr | Kirsty | Penkman | University of York |

